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MILITARY SERVITUDE AND GRANDEUR

BY

ALFRED DE VIGNY

TRANSLATION AND NOTE BY

FRANCES WILSON HUARD

AUTHOR OF "MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF HONOUR," "MY HOME IN THE FIELD OF MERCY," ETC., ETC.

NEW YORK

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

ALFRED DE VIGNY having expressed the desire that his works never be preceded by a preface, or a critical study of any kind, one can but respect the wishes of the great French poet, and refer those anxious to know more of his history to the writings of Messieurs St. Beuve, Ratisbonne, Brunetière, Lemaitre, France, etc.

The book on our own great war has not been written. We are still too close to events to see them in their just light. Time and meditation will be necessary to produce such a volume. But, anxious that the American public should better comprehend how pure and profound are the sources of French patriotism, I have asked the George H. Doran Company to publish this volume. Though first brought out in 1835, it contains so much that is analogous to the spirit that has inspired our modern heroes that it might almost be called a war book.

I do not know what fate awaits it in its new

garb, but the work of translation and editing has been done with almost pious care, and with no other thought than that of rendering homage to its author.

F. W. H.

January, 1919.

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BOOK I

MILITARY SERVITUDE AND GRANDEUR

MILITARY SERVITUDE AND GRANDEUR

CHAPTER I

MY MOTIVE IN THESE REMINISCENCES

If it is true, as the Catholic poet said, that there is no greater pain than to recall happy hours in misery, it is true also that the spirit finds a little happiness in recalling, at a moment of serenity and freedom, the hours of suffering and bondage. This melancholy emotion makes me cast a backward glance over a few years of my life, although those years are quite close to this one, and this life has not been very long as yet.

I cannot help saying how much I have seen of suffering, little known, and bravely borne by a race of men which has always been either scorned or honoured beyond measure, according to whether other nations found it useful or necessary.

Nevertheless it is not that sentiment alone

which urges me to this writing, and I hope at times it may serve to show, through details of the moral principles my eyes have observed, all that still remains benighted and barbarous in the wholly modern organisation of standing armies, where the fighting man is set apart from the citizen; where the former is unhappy and fierce, because he is aware of his abnormal and absurd situation. It is sad that everything about us should change, and the destiny of Armies alone remains unaltered. Christian law once changed the ferocious methods of warfare. But the consequences of the new principles it introduced have not been carried far enough on this head. Before its coming the vanquished was either massacred or enslaved for life, the captured towns were sacked, the inhabitants were driven out and scattered. Therefore, each terrified State would keep in constant readiness with desperate counter measures, and the defence was as atrocious as the attack.

At present, conquered cities have to fear naught save the payment of contributions.[1]

[1] This is true theoretically at least. But German practice has flaunted this precept of civilised warfare. The translator recalls anew that this book was written in 1835.

So warefare has become civilised. But the Armies have not. For not only has the routine of our customs preserved all that was wrong in them, but the ambition or the fears of Governments have increased the ill by setting them daily farther apart from the country, and by making them into a servitude more idle and uncouth than ever. I have little faith in the benefits of suddenly contrived organisations, but I understand those of successive changes for the better. When general attention has been called to a wound, its cure is not long in coming. No doubt this cure is a difficult problem for the legislator to solve, but that makes it all the more necessary to have put it.

This I do here. And if our era is not destined to achieve its solution, at least it shall have been I who formulated the desire for it, and, therefore, perhaps lessened its difficulties.

The era in which the Armies shall be identified with the Nation cannot be hastened too much, if it must lead to the time when Armies and War shall be no more, and when the earth shall hold but one Nation, of one mind upon her social forms at last—which event should have been brought about long since.

I have no design whatever to draw interest to myself, and these reminiscences shall be rather the memoirs of others than my own. But I have long enough been keenly hurt by the strangeness of Army life to be qualified to speak of it. It is only to prove this sorry right of mine, that I say a few words about myself.

I belong to that generation born with the (nineteenth) century, which, fed upon the Emperor's bulletins, always had a drawn sword before its eyes, and which came to take it up at the very moment when France resheathed it in the Bourbon scabbard. And so, in this modest picture of an obscure part of my life, I want to appear only as I was, to my deep regret, a spectator more than an actor. The events I sought never turned out as big as I would have wanted them. What could I do about it? One cannot always play the part he would have wished, and the coat does not always come to us at the moment we might wear it to best advantage. At the time in which I am writing,[1] a man of twenty years' service has never seen a pitched battle. I have few adventures to relate to you, but I have heard

[1] In 1835.

of many. So I shall let the others speak more than myself, except when I may be forced to call myself as a witness. I have always felt a little repugnance against that, being hindered from it by a certain bashfulness at the moment of introducing myself upon the scene. When it shall occur, I may vouch at least for my truthfulness in those spots. When people speak of themselves the best muse is frankness. I could not, with good grace, adorn myself with peacocks' feathers. Beautiful though they are, I believe every one should prefer his own to them. I am not sufficiently modest, I admit, to believe that I should gain much by putting on a little of some one else's finery, and posing in grand attitudes, artistically chosen and painfully preserved at the expense of good natural inclinations and the innate leaning towards truthfulness we all possess. I don't know but that in our day abuse has been made of such literary aping. It seems to me that the frowns of Bonaparte and Byron have set many an innocent face to grimacing.

Life is too short that we should lose a precious part of it disfiguring ourselves. If we had to do with a crude and easily duped people! But ours have such a keen and ready

eye. They recognise instantly from which model you borrow this word or that gesture, this speech or that favourite bearing, or even such a headgear or such a coat. They blow first of all on the frills of your mask, scorning your true face, the natural features of which they might otherwise have taken in a friendly manner.

So I will not make myself out much of a warrior, having seen little of war. But I have the right to speak of the manly customs in the Army, where fatigue and irksomeness were never spared me, customs which tempered my soul to an all-enduring patience by making it throw back all its forces upon solitary meditation and study. I could show also what there is that endears in the savage life of arms, hard though it be, having remained therein so long, between the echoes and the dreams of battles. They would assuredly have been fourteen lost years, had I not employed them in attentive and persevering observation, which profited by everything for future use. I even owe to the Army views on human nature which I could never have found elsewhere than beneath the military uniform. There are scenes which could never arise save through aversions that

would be truly intolerable if one were not honour-bound to tolerate them.

I have always liked listening and, when I was a wee child, I very soon acquired this taste on my old father's wounded knees. First he fed me on the accounts of his campaigns, and on his lap I found War seated beside me. He showed me what War meant by his wounds, in the parchments and in his ancestors' Coat-of-Arms, in the great pictures of them in armour which hung in an old Château in the Beauce. I saw in the Nobility one great family of hereditary soldiers and I thought only of growing to a soldier's size.

My father told of his long wars with the profound observation of a philosopher and the graciousness of a courtier. Through him I knew intimately Louis XIV and Frederick the Great. I should like to declare that I did not live of their days, so familiar do I feel with them through the many tales of the Seven Years' War.

My father had for Frederick II an enlightened admiration which sees the high abilities without marvelling at them beyond measure. From the very first he stirred my mind with this view, telling me how too much enthusiasm

for this illustrious enemy had been a mistake of the officers of his time; thereby they were already half beaten when Frederick advanced, made more formidable by French exaltation. Then, the division among themselves of the three powers, and of the French Generals among themselves, had abetted the dazzling fortune of his arms. But his greatness, above all, had been to know himself perfectly, to appraise at their true value the elements of his rise and, with the modesty of a sage, to do the honours of his victory. He seemed to think sometimes that Europe had helped him to it.

My father had seen this philosopher king at close range, on the battlefields where his brother, the eldest of my seven uncles, had been carried off by a cannon ball. He had been frequently received by the king under the Prussian tent, with a graciousness and courtesy that were wholly French, and had heard him discuss Voltaire and play the flute after a successful battle.

I find myself almost involuntarily speaking at length here, because this was the first great man whose portrait was thus, at home, limned for me from nature, and because my admiration for him was the first symptom of my fu-

tile love of arms, the primary cause of one of the most complete deceptions of my life. This portrait is still bright in my memory, with most vivid colours; and the physical portrait quite as much so as the other: His hat pushed forward over a powdered forehead; his stooped shoulders on horseback; his big eyes; his mouth, mocking and severe; his invalid's cane made like a crutch,—nothing was strange to me. Coming out of these tales I saw but grudgingly Bonaparte take his hat or snuffbox and make similar gestures. He seemed a plagiarist to me at first. And who knows but that the great man was a trifle a plagiarist on this point anyway? Who may weigh how much of the comedian enters into any man always in the public eye? Was not Frederick II the first type of the big captain of modern tactics, of the philosopher king and organiser?

Those were the first ideas roused in my mind, and I lived through other periods recounted with a truthfulness filled with sane lessons. I can still hear my father all exasperated over the disputes between the Prince de Soubise and Monsieur de Clermont. I can still hear his great indignation at the intrigues of l'Oeil-de-Boeuf, that caused the French generals to

leave each other in the lurch each in turn and on the battlefield, preferring the defeat of the Army to the triumph of a rival. I hear him deeply moved with his old friendships for Monsieur de Chevert and for Monsieur d'Assas, with whom he was in camp the night of the latter's death.

The eyes that had seen them put their images into mine, as well as those of many famous personages dead long before my birth. Family stories have the advantage of graving themselves more strongly into the mind than written narratives. They are vivid as the beloved story-teller himself and they lengthen our life backward, the way an imagination which divines may lengthen it ahead into the future.

I do not know if I shall write some day, for myself, all the intimate details of my life, but here I will speak only of one of the prepossessions of my soul. Sometimes when the spirit is tormented by the past and expects little of the future, one yields too easily to the temptation of amusing idlers with one's family secrets and one's heart's mysteries. I am aware that some writers have been pleased to let all eyes penetrate into the innermost of their lives

and of their consciences, even opening them to and letting them be surprised by the light, all disordered and encumbered by familiar memories and most cherished faults. Works like those are among the finest books in our tongue and will remain with us like those self-portraits Raphael never ceased painting. But the people who have pictured themselves in this way, either veiled or barefaced, have had the right to do so. I do not think that one can make his confessions aloud before being either old enough, or famous enough, or repentant enough to interest a whole nation in his sins. Until then one may scarcely pretend to be of use to the nation except by his ideas or his actions.

Towards the end of the Empire I was a heedless schoolboy. War was stirring in the schools. The drum smothered the masters' voices in my ears, and the mysterious voice of the books spoke but a cold and pedantic language. Logarithms and tropes in our eyes were but steps by which to climb to the star of the Legion of Honour, for children the most beautiful star in the heavens.

No meditation whatever could long restrain heads that were ceaselessly dizzied by the guns

and the bells of the *Te Deum!* When one of our chums who had left college a few months since, would reappear in a hussar's uniform, his arm in a sling, we blushed over our books and threw them at the masters' heads. The masters themselves never stopped reading us the bulletins of the *Grande Armée,* and our cries of *Vive l'Empereur!* interrupted Tacitus and Plato. Our preceptors resembled heralds at arms, our classrooms looked like barracks, our recreations were as drills and our examinations like army reviews.

Then more than ever a truly ungovernable love for the glory of arms took hold of me; a passion all the more unfortunate because it was the exact time when, as I have said, France began to be cured of it. But the storm was still growling. And neither my severe, harsh, compulsory and too precocious studies, nor the noise of the great world, in which I had plunged over-young to divert me from my inclination, could rid me of my fixed idea.

I have often smiled pityingly at myself on seeing how strongly an idea gets hold of one, how it cheats one, and how much time it takes to rid oneself of it. Satiety itself merely succeeded in making me disobey it, not in destroy-

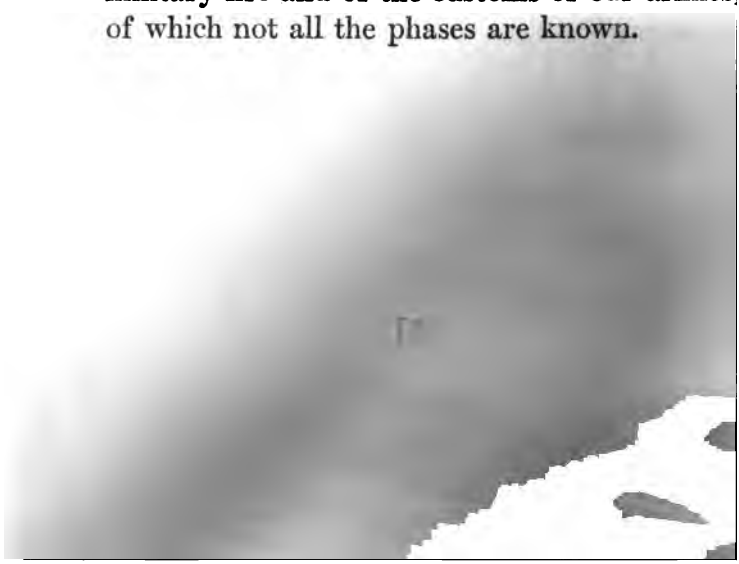
ing it within me, and this book also proves that I still enjoy caressing it, and that I am not far from relapsing into its sway. Thus deep are childhood impressions, and thus the burning mark of the Roman Eagle was graven upon our hearts.

Only long afterwards did I perceive that my service had been one long mistake and that, to a wholly active life, I had brought an entirely contemplative nature. But I had followed the bent of that generation of the Empire, born with the Century, and to which I belong.

War seemed to us so much the natural condition of our country, that we could not believe the calm of peace would last when, released from our studies, we had flung ourselves into the Army, following the usual course of our torrent. It seemed to us that we risked nothing in making believe we were resting, and that supineness, in France, was not a grave evil. This impression lasted as long as did the Restoration. Each year brought the hope of a war. We did not dare lay down the sword for fear that the day on which we resigned might be the eve of a campaign. So we trailed along and lost precious years, dreaming of the bat-

tlefield in the Champ-de-Mars, and exhaust ing a powerful but useless energy in parad exercises and private quarrels.

Overwhelmed by a tediousness which I hac not expected in this life I had so keenly desired it became a need for me to escape, of nights the wearying and vain tumult of the military days. Out of these nights, in which I silently enhanced whatever knowledge I had gained from our tumultuous public studies, came forth my poems and my books. Out of those days I retained the reminiscences, the main features of which I am collecting here, around an idea. For, taking into account neither the present nor the future for the glory of arms, I have sought it in the memories of my companions. What little happened to me will serve merely as a frame to these pictures of military life and of the customs of our armies, of which not all the phases are known.



CHAPTER II

THE GENERAL CHARACTER OF THE ARMIES

THE Army is a nation within the nation. It is one of the vices of our times. In antiquity it was otherwise: each citizen was a warrior and each warrior was a citizen. The army men and the city men had faces that were much alike. Fear of the gods and of the laws, loyalty to country, austerity of morals, and—strange thing!—love of peace and order were to be found more often in the camps than in the cities, because it was the flower of the nation that inhabited them.

Peace had even harder tasks than war for these intelligent armies. By them their country's soil was covered with public buildings or furrowed with great highways, and the Roman [illegible] the aqueducts was moulded, like Rome [illegible] by the hands that defended her. [illegible] the soldiers, in peace time, was [illegible] that of ours is barren and detri-

mental. The citizens had neither a hysterical admiration for their valour, nor scorn for their idleness because the same blood circulated unceasingly from the veins of the Nation into the veins of the Army.

In the Middle Ages on down until the end of the reign of Louis XIV, the Army clung to the Nation, if not through all of its soldiers, at least through all of their chiefs, because the soldier was the nobleman's man, raised by him on his estate, taken into the Army in his suite, and depending on him alone. The soldier's master, then, was a landowner who lived in the very bosom of his mother country. Under the very popular influence of the priest, he did nothing, in the middle ages, but devote himself body and wealth to his country, frequently in struggles against the crown, and ceaselessly in revolt against a hierarchy of powers, obedience to which would have led to too deep abasement, and consequently to humiliation of the profession of arms.

The regiment belonged to the Colonel, the company to the Captain and both the one and the other were quite capable of taking their men away with them whenever their conscience, as citizens, did not approve the orders they re-

ceived as warriors. This independence of the Army lasted, in France, until the days of Louvois, who first subjected the Army to the Government offices and placed it again, bound hand and foot, in the clutch of the Sovereign Power.

In this he met with no little resistance. The last defenders of the generous liberty of the fighting men were those rough and ready noblemen who would take their household soldiers into the Army only to go to war. Although they did not spend the year eternally drilling their men to become automatons, I notice that the latter came off quite well on Turenne's battlefields. They particularly hated the uniform which made every one look alike and subjected the spirit to the coat and not to the man. They loved to dress in red on days of battle so as to be better seen by their own men, and better aimed at by the enemy.

I like to recall Mirabeau's story of the old Marquis de Coëtquen, who, rather than appear in uniform at the King's review, suffered himself to be broken by the king at the head of his regiment. "It is fortunate, Sire, that though broken the pieces are left to me," said he aft-

erwards. It was something to have made such a reply to Louis XIV.

Now I do not ignore the thousand shortcomings of the organisation which expired then and there, but I do say that it had this advantage over ours in that it permitted the national, warlike fire of France to crackle and blaze more freely. This sort of army was a very strong and very complete armour with which the country covered the Sovereign Power, but from which all the pieces might detach themselves at will, one after another, whenever that Power used them against her.

The destiny of a modern Army is quite different to that, and the centralisation of the Powers has made it what it is. It is a body set apart from the great body of the nation. It resembles the body of a child inasmuch as its intelligence is backward and has been forbidden to grow. No sooner has the modern Army ceased fighting than it becomes a sort of police force. It feels ashamed of itself and knows neither what it is doing nor what it is. It asks itself constantly if it be slave or sovereign of the State. It is a body seeking everywhere for its soul and cannot seem to find it.

The "Sold" man,[1] the Soldier, is a glorious but miserable being, a victim and an executioner—a scapegoat sacrificed daily to his people and for his people who make a plaything of him. He is a martyr, at the same time ferocious and humble, bandied between the Sovereign Power and the Nation who are forever at odds concerning him.

How many times when I have had to take my obscure but active part in our civil troubles, have I felt my conscience become indignant at this inferior and cruel condition! How many times have I compared this existence to that of the gladiator! The people are the indifferent Cæsar, the sneering Claudius, to whom the soldiers coarsely say in passing: "Those who go to die salute thee."

Let some workmen, growing the worse off the more their labour and industry increase, start to rebel against their employer; or suppose that some manufacturer has a notion to swell his income by a few hundred thousand francs this year or simply that some "good town," jealous of Paris, would like to have its three-day shooting party,—cries for help are

[1] The translator acknowledges taking etymological liberties.

immediately issued. The government, whatever it be, replies quite sensibly: "The law does not allow me to judge you; everybody is right; all I can do is to send you my gladiators who will kill you and whom you will kill!" They actually go, they kill, they are killed. Peace returns; everybody kisses and makes up and compliments everybody else, and the rabbit hunters congratulate themselves upon their skill in shooting an officer or a soldier. When all accounts are made up, nothing remains but the simple subtraction of a few dead. But the soldiers are not figured into the reckoning. They do not count! Nobody worries much about them! It is understood that those who die in uniform have neither father, mother, wife nor sweetheart to be crushed and bathed in tears. Theirs is anonymous blood.

Sometimes (a frequent occurrence nowadays) both contending parties unite to overwhelm with hatred and malediction the unfortunates sent out and condemned to quell them.

Therefore, the sentiment which will dominate in this book is that which made me begin it: The desire to fend from the soldier's head this malediction the citizen is often ready to heap upon it, and to call down upon the

Army the pardon of the Nation. The most beautiful thing, after inspiration, is devotion; after the poet, it is the soldier. It is not the soldier's fault that he is condemned to a helot's state.

The Army is blind and dumb. It strikes where it is put. It wills nothing and its action is started as with a spring. It is a big thing that others control and that kills. But it is a thing that suffers, too!

Because of that I have always spoken of the Army with an involuntary tenderness. We are now living in grave times when the cities of France, each in turn, become battlefields and since some little while we have had much to pardon to the men that kill.

Looking from nearby at the life of these armed troops, which each succeeding Power will daily force upon us, it will be truly seen that the soldier's existence is the saddest relic of barbarism subsisting among mankind. I have said so and I believe it is, next to capital punishment! But it will be seen also that nothing is more worthy of the interest and the love of the Nation than this sacrificial family which sometimes gives the Nation such wondrous glory.

CHAPTER III

THE LIFE OF A SOLDIER AND HIS INDIVIDUAL CHARACTER

SOMETIMES the words in our familiar speech have a perfect exactness of meaning. It is indeed "to serve," to obey and to command in an Army. One may shudder at this servitude, but its slaves must be justly admired. They all accept their fate with all its consequences and, in France particularly, the qualities exacted by the military state are assumed with extreme alacrity. All this activity we possess suddenly vanishes to make room for indescribable dejection and dismay.

The life is dull, monotonous, regular. The hours beaten by the drummer are as muffled and sombre as himself. The gait and the aspect are uniform as is the dress. The vivacity of youth and the slowness of ripe age take the same pace in the end, and it is the pace of one's branch of service. The branch in which one

serves is the mould in which one casts his character, in which it is changed and remoulded to take a general shape stamped for all time. The man effaces himself beneath the soldier.

Military thraldom is heavy and inflexible like the iron mask of the nameless prisoner, and gives to each fighting man a cold and uniform look.

And so, by a mere aspect of an army corps, one becomes aware that tedium and discontent are the general features of the military countenance. Weariness adds its wrinkles, the sun its sallow complexion and encroaching age furrows faces but thirty years old. Nevertheless a thought common to all frequently gives to this gathering of serious men a great, majestic character. This thought is Abnegation!

The abnegation, the effacement of self of the warrior is a cross heavier than that of the martyr. It must be borne a long time to realise its sublimity as well as its weight.

Sacrifice must indeed be the finest thing on earth, because there is so much of beauty in simple men who frequently have no thought of their merit and the secret of their life. It is sacrifice which, from this life of hardship and

tedium, causes to emerge as by a miracle an artificial but generous character, moulded in lines that are big and fine like those of antique medals.

The complete Abnegation of Self I just mentioned; the continual and indifferent awaiting of death; the entire renunciation of the freedom to think and act; the tardiness imposed upon stinted ambition, and the impossibility of amassing wealth produce virtues which are rarer among the free and active classes.

Generally speaking, the military character is simple, good, patient; something childlike is to be found in it, because regimental life takes a little after school life. The traits of roughness and gloom which darken it are stamped on it by tedium, but particularly by the always false position regarding the Nation and by the necessary comedy of authority.

The absolute authority a man exercises constrains him to perpetual reserve. He may never unwrinkle his brow before his subordinates without letting them lapse into familiarities which would endanger his power. He refrains from friendly grace and gossip lest there be marked down against him some con-

cession to the amenities of life, or some weakness which might set a bad example.

I have known officers who shut themselves into Trappist silence and whose serious lips never lifted their moustachios except to allow a command to pass between them. Under the Empire such was almost always the countenance of superior officers and generals. The example had been set by the master, the custom rigidly preserved—and with reason. For, to the necessary consideration of putting aside familiarity, was added the need of their riper experience to preserve their dignity in the eyes of the youth, better instructed than they, sent continually by the military schools and arriving bristling with figures and the assurance of laureates, whom silence alone could keep bridled.

I have never cared for the species of young officers, not even when I was one of them myself. A secret instinct for the truth warned me that in all things theory is nothing compared with practice. And the grave, silent smile of the old captains kept me on my guard against that poor science which is learned in a few days of reading. In the regiments in which I served I loved to listen to those old officers

whose bent shoulders still had the bearing of the soldier's back loaded with a knapsack full of clothing and a cartridge case full of cartridges. They told me old tales of Egypt, Italy and Russia, which taught me more about war than the ordinance of 1789, the service regulations and the interminable instructions starting with those of the Great Frederick to his generals.

On the contrary, I found something fastidious in the confident, empty and ignorant foppishness of the young officers of that period; eternal smokers and gamblers, attentive only to the requirements of their behaviour, experts on the cut of their coats, café and billiard room orators. Their conversation was no more characteristic than that of any commonplace youths of fashion; their banalities were only a bit more vulgar.

To draw some profit from my environment I lost no opportunity of listening. And I awaited most habitually the hours of the regular promenades, when the old officers liked to exchange their reminiscences. As for them, they rather enjoyed writing in my memory the private histories of their lives. Finding in me a patience equal to their own, and quite as

serious a silence, they showed themselves ever ready always to open their hearts to me. Of evenings we would often walk in the fields or the woods around the garrison towns, or by the sea, and the general view of nature, or the slightest peculiarity of the ground would waken their inexhaustible memories: it would be a naval battle, a famous retreat, a fatal ambush, an infantry fight, a siege—and always there would be regrets for the time of danger, and respect for the memory of such and such a great general, a naïve recognition of an obscure name they thought illustrious.

And with it all would be a simplicity of heart which filled mine with a sort of veneration for these manly characters, forged in continuous adversity and in the doubts of a false and erroneous situation.

I have the gift, a sad one often, of a memory which does not alter with time. My whole life with all its days is ever with me like an ineradicable picture. The features never become confused. The colours never dim. Some are black and lose none of their force that afflicts me. There are some flowers, too, with blossoms still as fresh as on the day they blew—particularly when an involuntary tear drops on

them from my eyes and gives them a keener brilliance.

The most useless conversation of my life comes back to me always on the very instant I call it forth and I would have too much to say if I were to relate stories that have no merit save a naïve truth. But filled as I am with a friendly pity for the misery of the Armies I will pick from among my memories those that show up to me like decent enough cloaks, with forms worthy of covering a chosen thought and of showing how many conditions adverse to the development of character and intelligence spring from the cross of servitude and the benighted customs of the standing Armies.

Their crown is a crown of thorns and among its pricks none is more painful, I believe, than that of passive obedience. It will also be the first of which I shall make the sting felt. I put it foremost because it provides me with the first example of the cruel necessities of the Army, in the order of my years. When I hark back to my earliest memories, I find in my military infancy an anecdote which is fresh in my mind, and I will retell it just as it was told me, without seeking, but also without

evading, in any of my accounts the minute features of military life or character, which both one and the other (I cannot sufficiently reiterate) are behind the general spirit and progress of the nation, and consequently are always stamped with a certain puerility.

BOOK II

LAURETTE, OR THE RED SEAL

BOOK II: LAURETTE, OR THE RED SEAL

CHAPTER I

AN ENCOUNTER ON THE HIGHWAY ONE DAY

THE high road through Artois and Flanders is long and sad. It stretches out in a straight line, treeless and without ditches, through flat countryside which at all times is full of a yellow mud. In the month of March, 1815, I travelled that road, and I had an encounter which I have not forgotten since.

I was alone, I was on horseback, I had a fine white cloak, a red suit, a black helmet, pistols and a big sabre. It had been pouring rain for four days and four nights of our march, and I remember that I was singing *Joconde* at the top of my voice. I was so young! The King's household in 1814 had been made up of children and old men; the Emperor seemed to have taken and killed all the others.

My comrades were ahead on the road, following King Louis XVIII; I could see their white cloaks and red suits on the edge of the horizon to the North; Bonaparte's lancers, who watched and followed our retreat step by step, from time to time showed the tricoloured flame of their lances on the opposite horizon. A cast shoe had kept back my horse: he was young and strong; I urged him on to rejoin my squadron; he started at a brisk trot. I put my hand to my belt, that was comfortably filled with gold. I heard the steel scabbard of my sabre ring against the stirrup. And I felt very proud and perfectly happy.

And still it rained, and still I sang. Nevertheless I soon stopped, bored with hearing only myself. And then I heard nothing more except the rain and the feet of my horse floundering in the ruts. The road was no longer paved. I sank in, and had to slow down to a walk. The outside of my big boots was thickly plastered with mud yellow as ochre; inside they were rapidly filling with rain. I looked at my brand new gold epaulettes that were my joy and my consolation. They were all roughed up by the water. That, to me, was an affliction.

My horse hung his head. So did I. I fell to thinking, and for the first time I asked myself where I was going. I knew absolutely nothing about it. But that did not trouble me long: I was sure that my squadron being there, ahead, there also lay my duty. Because I felt a profound and unalterable calm in my heart, I gave thanks to this ineffable sense of Duty, and I tried to explain it to myself. Having seen at close quarters how unaccustomed hardships were gaily borne by heads so flaxen or so white, how a secure future was so scornfully risked by so many men of happy and worldly lives, and taking my share in the miraculous satisfaction afforded every man by the conviction that he may slight no debt of honour, I understood that abnegation is easier and commoner than people think.

I asked myself if self-abnegation were not a sense born in us; what was this need to obey and to place one's will in other hands, like a heavy and troublesome burden; whence came the secret happiness in being rid of this load, and how it was that human pride had never revolted against it. I clearly saw this mysterious instinct everywhere binding peoples into powerful groups. But I saw nowhere so com-

pletely and redoubtably as in the Army this renunciation of actions, words, desires and almost of thoughts. Everywhere I observed the usual possible resistance, the citizen showing in every instance a clear-sighted and intelligent obedience which inquires and may stop short. I even saw woman's tender submission cease where evil begins to be imposed upon her, and the law take her defence. But military obedience, passive and active at one and the same time, receiving orders and executing them, strikes blindly, as Destiny of old! I traced the possible consequences of this abnegation of the soldier, without recourse, without condition, and sometimes leading to sinister tasks.

Such were my thoughts as I went along at the pleasure of my horse, knowing the hour by my watch and seeing the road ever stretching out its straight line, without a tree, without a house, cutting the plain to the horizon, like a great yellow stripe on a grey cloth. There were times when the liquid stripe would run over into the liquid ground surrounding it. And when the light, growing a little less pale, would illuminate this sad expanse of country,

I could see myself amid a miry sea, following a stream of slime and plaster.

While closely examining this yellow stripe of road, I noticed on it, about a quarter of a mile away, a little black dot that was moving. I was delighted; it was somebody. I did not take my eyes from it. I saw that this black dot was headed, like myself, in the direction of Lille, and that it was zigzagging, which indicated difficult going. I hastened my pace and I gained ground on this object, which lengthened a bit and grew to my sight. I started again to trot on more solid soil and I thought I recognised a sort of small black carriage. I was hungry. I hoped it might be a canteen wagon and considering my poor horse a sloop, I made it stir its oars to reach the blessed isle in this sea into which we sometimes sunk belly-deep.

A hundred paces further, I clearly distinguished a little cart of white wood covered with three hoops and a black oilcloth. It resembled a little cradle hung on two wheels. The wheels sank in the mud to the hubs. A small mule which pulled it was led with difficulty by a man on foot who held the bridle. I approached him and considered him attentively.

He was a man of about fifty with white whiskers, strong and tall, a bit round shouldered after the manner of old infantry officers who have carried the knapsack. He wore their uniform, and the shoulderstrap of a battalion chief might be seen under a little, worn, short, blue cloak. His face was hardened, but good, the kind of which there are so many in the Army. He looked at me sidelong under his heavy black eyebrows, and from his cart he quickly pulled a rifle which he cocked while passing to the other side of his mule, thus making a rampart for himself. Having seen his white cockade, I contented myself with showing the sleeve of my red suit, and he put his gun back in the cart saying:

"Ah! that's different, I took you for one of those ruffians who are running us down. Would you like to have a drop?"

"Gladly," I said, coming closer; "I have not had a drink for forty-eight hours."

Around his neck he carried a cocoanut, very well carved, arranged like a flask, with a silver neck and of which he seemed to be proud. He passed it on to me and I drank from it a little bad white wine with much good pleasure. I handed him back his flask.

"The health of the King," he said, drinking; "he made me an officer of the Legion of Honour. It is therefore right that I should follow him to the frontier. But alas! as I have nothing but my shoulderstraps for a living, I shall take back my regiment afterwards. It's my duty."

Speaking thus, and as if to himself, he started his little mule, while murmuring we had no time to lose. And being of the same mind, I continued my way a few paces from him. All the time I looked at him without questioning, for I never have liked the gossipy indiscretion quite customary among us.

For about a quarter of a mile we went on without a word. As he stopped then to rest his poor little mule which it hurt me to look at, I too stopped and tried to squeeze out the water that filled my riding boots like two tubs in which my legs would be soaked.

"Your boots are beginning to stick to your feet," he said.

"I have not had them off for four nights," said I to him.

"Bah, in a week you'll not think of it any more," he returned in his hoarse voice; "it's something to be alone, now, in such times as we

are living in. Do you know what I have in there?"

"No," I told him.

"It's a woman."

I said, "Ah!" without much astonishment and slowly continued my way. He followed me.

"That miserable barrow did not cost much," he continued, "nor the mule either. But it's all I need, though this road is a bit longer than the ordinary wig ribbon."

I offered to let him mount my horse when he should feel tired. And as I did not speak other than seriously and simply of his carriage, which he knew was grotesque, he suddenly felt more at ease and, coming close to my stirrup, he tapped me on the knee, saying:

"Oh well, you're a good boy, even though you do belong to the Reds."

I felt, from the bitter tone in which he thus designated the four Red Companies, how much hateful prejudice the luxury and the rank of this corps of officers had caused in the Army.

"However," he added, "I won't accept your offer, seeing that I don't know how to ride a horse as that is not in my line of business."

"But, Major, the superior officers like yourself are obliged to ride."

"Bah, once a year, at inspection, and then on a hired horse. I have always been a marine, and a footsoldier since. I don't know how to ride horseback."

He went ahead twenty paces, looking at me sideways now and then, as if awaiting a question. And as not a word came, he continued:

"You're not a bit curious, are you? What I am telling you there should astound you!"

"I'm not easily astonished," said I.

"Oh! nevertheless, if I told you how I quit the sea, we'd see whether you would be or not."

"Well," I rejoined, "why don't you try? It will warm you up, and it will make me forget that the rain is coming in at the back of my neck and does not stop till it reaches my heels."

The good battalion chief solemnly made ready for speech, with all the pleasure of a child. He readjusted the black oilcloth-covered shako on his head, and he gave that shrug of the shoulder no one can produce that has not served in the infantry; that shoulder-shrug the footsoldier gives to his knapsack to raise it and to ease its burden for a moment. It is a soldier's habit which, when he becomes

an officer, becomes a twitch. After this convulsive gesture, he drank another sip of wine from his cocoanut, gave his mule a kick in the rump for encouragement, and began.

CHAPTER II

HISTORY OF THE RED SEAL

FIRST you shall know, my boy, that I was born at Brest. I began by being a troop-child, earning my half-ration and my half-pay from the age of nine. My father was a soldier of the Guards. But I loved the sea. So one fine night while on leave at Brest I stowed away in the hold of a merchantman bound for India. I was not discovered till out at sea, and the captain preferred making me cabin-boy to throwing me overboard. When the Revolution came I had made headway. Having scoured the seas for fifteen years, I had, in my turn, become the captain of a small merchantman, quite a tidy one.

When the Royal Ex-Navy—good old Navy, upon my word—suddenly found itself without officers, captains were taken from the merchant marine. I had been through a few filibuster affairs—of which I might tell you later

—and I was given command of a war-brig called the *Marat.*

On the 28th of *Fructidor,* 1797, I received orders to get under sail for Cayenne. I was to take out sixty soldiers and one convict left over from the one hundred and ninety-three the frigate *La Decade* had taken aboard a few days previous. My orders were to treat this individual with consideration and the first letter from the *Directoire* enclosed a second sealed with three red seals, in the centre of which was one huge one. I was forbidden to open this letter before the first degree latitude North, from 27 degrees to 28 degrees longitude, that is to say, close to the line.

This big letter had a most particular look. It was long and so tightly closed that I could read nothing under the corners nor through the envelope. I am not superstitious, but it scared me, that letter did. I put it in my cabin, under the glass of a bad little English clock nailed over my bed. That bed was a regular seaman's bed, the way you know they are. But what am I saying to you: you're barely sixteen, you can't have seen anything like that.

A queen's chamber cannot be more neatly

arranged than a mariner's, and that's said without wanting to brag. Everything has its little place and its little nail. Nothing rattles around. The vessel may roll all it pleases without disarranging a thing. The furniture is made according to the shape of the vessel and the little room it's in. My bed was a chest. When opened I lay in it. When closed it was my sofa and I smoked my pipe on it. Sometimes it was my table and then you'd have to sit at it on little kegs that were in the room. My floor was waxed and polished like mahogany, and shone like a gem: a regular mirror! Oh! it was a fine little room! And my brig was worth while too. Often we'd amuse ourselves in proper style, and the voyage began pleasant enough this trip, if it were not—— But let us not anticipate.

We had a fine North-northwest wind and I was busy putting that letter under the glass of my clock when my convict entered my room. He held by the hand a pretty little girl of about seventeen. He was only nineteen, he told me; a handsome fellow, though a little pale and too white for a man. But he was a man just the same, and a man who behaved, when the time came, better than many old men

might have done: you shall see. He held his little wife by the arm. She was fresh and bright as a child. They looked like two turtledoves. I liked to see them, I did. I said to them:

—"Well, children! you have come to visit with the old captain; that's nice of you. I am taking you pretty far; but so much the better, we'll have time to get acquainted. I don't like receiving Madame without my coat on; but it's only because I am nailing this big rascal of a letter up there. Would you like to help me a little?"

They were really good children. The little husband took the hammer, and the little wife the nails and they passed them to me as I asked them. And she would say to me: "To the right, to the left! Captain!" laughing all the time, because the pitching made my clock toss about. I can still hear her, with her little voice: "To the right! to the left! Captain!" She was making fun of me. —"Ah!" I said, "you naughty child, I shall have your husband scold you." Then she threw her arms around his neck and kissed him. They were really charming, and so we got acquainted. We were good friends at once.

We had a fine passage too. I always had

weather made to order. As I had never had any but black faces on board my ship, I had the two lovers come to my table every day. That livened me up. When we had eaten our biscuit and fish, the little wife and her husband would sit looking at one another as if they had never seen each other before. Then I would burst out laughing heartily and make fun of them. They laughed with me, too. It would have made you laugh to see us like three imbeciles that did not know what was the matter with us. It was because it was truly wonderful to see them love each other like that! They were at ease everywhere. Whatever was put before them they thought all right. Yet they were on rations like the rest of us. I only added a bit of Swedish brandy when they dined with me, just a little glass to keep up my rank. They slept in a hammock, where the vessel rolled them like those two pears I have here in my wet kerchief. They were lively and content. I did as you do, I asked no questions. What business had I to know their names and their affairs—I, a water rat? I carried them to the other side of the ocean, as I would have carried two birds of paradise.

At the end of a month I regarded them as

my children. Every day, when I called them, they would come and sit near me. The young man wrote on my table, that is to say, my bed. And if I cared to, he would help me make my day's reckoning: very soon he knew how as well as I. Sometimes he amazed me. The young wife would sit herself down on a little keg and start sewing.

One day when they were sitting like that, I told them:

—"Do you know, little friends, that we make a family picture the way we are here? I don't want to quiz you, but probably you have no more money than you need and you are both pretty delicate for spading and digging the way Cayenne convicts do. It is villainous country, that I can tell you with all my heart. But an old sun-dried wolf-hide like me, could live there like a lord. If you feel, as I think you do (without wishing to quiz you), more or less friendly towards me, I would quit my old brig gladly enough. It is only an old tub now, and if you would like, I would settle there with you. I have no more relatives than a dog, and I am tired of being alone. You would make a little company for me. I could help you in many ways. And I have gathered a nice little

lot of contraband honestly enough. We would live on that and I would leave it to you when I turn up my toes, as we put it politely."

They kept staring at each other, all amazement, looking as if they could not believe that I was speaking seriously. And the little one ran, the way she always did, to put her arms around her husband's neck, and sat on his lap all red and tearful. He squeezed her tight in his arms, and I saw tears in his eyes, too. He gave me his hand and grew paler than usual. She whispered to him, and her long blonde hair fell loose all over his shoulder. Her chignon had become undone like a cable suddenly untwisting, because she was as lively as a fish. If you had seen that hair! It was like gold. When they continued whispering, the young man kissing her forehead from time to time, and she crying, I grew impatient.

—"Well, does that suit you?" I said to them at last.

—"But . . . but, Captain, you are very kind," said the husband. "But it is . . . You can't live with convicts, and . . ." He lowered his eyes.

—"I don't know what you have done to be a convict, but you will tell it to me some day, or

not at all, if you please. You don't look to me as if you had a very heavy conscience and I am very sure that I have done a great deal more than you in my life, you poor innocents. Just the same, as long as you are under my guard I won't let you loose, and you must not expect it. I'd rather cut off your necks like a brace of pigeons. But once my shoulderstraps are laid aside, I no longer know admiral nor anything."

—"But," he resumed, sadly shaking his brown head which was a little powdered the way it was still being done at that time. —"But I believe it would be dangerous for you, Captain, to seem to know us. We laugh because we are young. We look happy because we love each other. But I have villainous moments when I think of the future, and I don't know what will become of my poor Laure."

Again he pressed the young woman's head against his breast:

—"That is what I had to say to the Captain; is it not the same thing you would have said, child?"

I took my pipe and got up, because I began to feel my eyes getting a little wet. And I don't like that to happen.

—"Come! come!" I said, "all that will clear up presently. If the tobacco bothers Madame, her absence is necessary."

She rose, her face afire and all moist with tears, like a child that has been scolded.

—"After all," she said, looking at my clock, "you people never give it a thought—how about that letter?"

I sensed something that made an impression on me. I felt something like a pain in my hair when she told me that.

—"Good Lord! Most certainly, I had not given it a thought." Ah! my word, here was a nice to do; if we had passed the first degree North latitude nothing would have been left for me but jump overboard. How happy I must have been to let this child remind me of the big rascal of a letter!

I quickly looked at my sea chart and when I saw we still had a week at least to go, my mind was at ease. But not my heart, and I did not know why.

—"The *Directoire* does not trifle in the matter of obedience!" I said. "Well, I am still in the running. Time has flown so swiftly that I had completely forgotten that."

Well, sir, we remained all three noses in

the air looking at that letter as if it were going to speak to us. What struck me particularly was that the sun, slanting through the skylight, lit up the glass of the clock and made the big red seal, and the other little ones, appear like the features of a face in the midst of a fire.

—"Would not you say that its eyes are popping out of its head?" I said to them to amuse them.

—"Oh! my friend," said the young woman, "they resemble spots of blood."

—"Bah! Bah!" said her husband, taking her by the arm. "You are wrong, Laure. It looks like a wedding invitation. Come and rest a bit, come. Why does this letter trouble you?"

They ran off as if a ghost were pursuing them and climbed on the bridge. I remained alone with that big letter. And I remember that I kept looking at it, smoking my pipe, as if its red eyes had fastened on mine, drawing them the way a serpent's eyes do. Its big white face, its third seal, bigger than the eyes, wide open, yawning like a wolf's mouth . . . all that put me in a bad temper. I snatched my coat and hung it over the clock, to see neither the time nor the dog of a letter any more.

I went to finish my pipe on the bridge. There I stayed till night.

We were then as far as the Cape Verde Islands. The *Marat* ran, before the wind, her ten knots without trouble. The night was the most beautiful I have seen in all my life near the tropics. The moon rose on the horizon, large as a sun. The sea cut her in two and became all white like a sheet of snow covered with tiny diamonds. I gazed at the whole scene, smoking, seated on my bench. The officer on duty and the sailors said nothing and watched, like myself, the shadow of the brig on the water. I was content to hear nothing. I love silence and order, I do. I had forbidden all noises and all lights. Nevertheless, I caught sight of a small red line almost beneath my feet. I might well have flown into a rage about that right away. But as it was my little convicts, I wanted to make sure what they were doing before getting angry. All I had to do was to bend down and I could see, through the big hatch, into their little room. And I looked.

The young wife was on her knees saying her prayers. There was a little lamp shining on her. She was in her nightrobe. I could see,

from above, her bare snoulders, her little naked feet, and her long blond hair all dishevelled. I thought of drawing back, but I said to myself:—Bah! an old soldier, what does it matter? And I kept looking.

Her husband was sitting on a little trunk, his head on his hands, and watched her praying. She lifted her head as if to Heaven and I saw her big blue eyes were moist like a Madeleine's. While she prayed he took the ends of her long hair and kissed them without making a noise. When she was finished she made the sign of the cross and smiled with a look as though entering Paradise. I saw that he, like her, made a sign of the cross, but as if he were ashamed of it. As a matter of fact it is a strange thing for a man to do.

She stood upright, embraced him, and stretched out first in the hammock, in which he laid her without a word, the way a child is laid into a swinging cradle. It was suffocatingly hot. She felt herself pleasantly rocked by the motion of the vessel and seemed already to be falling asleep. Her little white feet were crossed and raised on a level with her head and all her body was wrapped in her long white gown. She was very lovely.

—"My dear," she said drowsily, "aren't you sleepy? It is very late, you know."

He remained, his head buried in his hands, without answering. That troubled her a bit, good little thing, and she stuck her pretty head outside the hammock, like a bird out of its nest, and looked at him with half open mouth, not daring to say more.

Finally he said to her:

—"My dear Laure, the closer we come to America, the less can I help becoming sad. I don't know why. It seems to me that the happiest time of our life shall have been the time of this crossing."

—"So it seems to me," she said. "I would like never to arrive at all."

He looked at her clenching his hands with a rapture you cannot imagine.

—"And yet, my angel, you always weep when you pray to God," he said. "That grieves me a great deal, for well I know of whom you are thinking, and I fancy you regret what you have done."

—"I? Regret?" she said with a pained look. "I regret having followed you, dear! Do you believe that for having belonged to you so little, I have loved you less? Is one not a woman,

does one not know her duties at seventeen? Did not my mother and my sisters say it was my duty to follow you to Guyana? Did they not say that there was nothing surprising in that? I only wonder that you have been touched by it, dear; it is all so natural. And now I don't know how you can believe that I regret a thing, when I am with you to help you live, or to die with you when you die."

All this she said in a voice so sweet that you would have believed it was music. I was greatly moved by it, and I said to myself:

—"You fine little woman!"

The young man fell to sighing and tapping with his foot while kissing the beautiful hand and the bare arm she stretched out to him.

—"Oh! Laurette, my Laurette!" he said, "when I think that, had we delayed our wedding four days, I would have been arrested alone and would have left all alone, I cannot forgive myself."

Then the little beauty leaned out of the hammock, both her pretty white arms bare to the shoulder, and caressed his forehead, his hair and his eyes, enfolding his head as if to take it and hide it in her breast. She smiled like a child, and crooned a lot of little woman

talk to him, the like of which I had never heard. She closed his mouth with her fingers in order to speak alone. Cuddling him and taking her long hair for a kerchief to wipe his eyes, she said:

—"Isn't it much better to have a woman with you who loves you, dear? I am very glad to go to Cayenne. I will see savages, and cocoanut trees like those of 'Paul and Virginia,' won't I? We will each plant our own. We will see who is the better gardener. We will build us a tiny house for two. I shall work all day and all night, if you want me to. I am strong. Look, see my arms; look, I could almost lift you. Don't make fun of me. I can embroider very well, besides. And is there not a town somewhere there where embroiderers are needed? I will give drawing and music lessons too, if people want them. And if people can read there, you will write."

I recall that the poor boy was so desperate that he cried out loud when she said that.

—"Write!" he cried. "Write!"

And he clutched his right hand with the left one, squeezing it at the wrist.

—"Ah! write! why have I ever been able to write! Writing! why, it's a fool's job! . . . I

believed in their liberty of the press! Where was my mind? And why? Just to print five or six poor, mediocre enough ideas, read only by those who care for them, flung into the fire by those who hate them, and no good except to have us persecuted! Personally it matters little! But you, beautiful angel, become a woman barely four days before! What had you done? Explain to me, I beg of you, how I have permitted you to be good to the extent of following me here? Do you even know where you are, poor little thing? And where you are going, do you know? Very soon, dear child, you will be thousands of miles away from your mother and your sisters . . . and for me! All for me!"

She hid her face in the hammock for a moment. And I, from above, I could see that she was crying. But he down below did not see her face. And when she peeped out of the cloth, it was smilingly, to give him cheer.

—"True, we are not rich right now," she said, bursting out laughing. "Look, my purse, I have only a single louis left. And you?"

He, too, began to laugh like a child:—"My word, I had a crown left, but I gave it to the little boy who carried your trunk."

—"Ah, bah! What does it matter?" she said, snapping her little white fingers like castanets; "people are never gayer than when they have nothing. And have I not in reserve two diamond rings my mother gave me? Those are good anywhere you wish. Moreover, I believe that good captain fellow does not just talk of his good intentions towards us, and that he knows very well what is in the letter. It is sure to be a recommendation for us to the Governor of Cayenne."

—"Perhaps," he answered; "who knows?"

—"Surely it is," cried his little wife; "you are so good that I am sure the Government has exiled you for a little while, but holds nothing against you."

She had said that so well! calling me that good captain fellow, that I was completely moved and softened by it. And in my heart, I even rejoiced over what she had perhaps rightly guessed about the sealed letter. They began to embrace each other again. I stamped my foot impatiently on the deck to make them stop.

I shouted at them:

—"Here! look you, my young friends, or-

ders are to put out all lights on the ship. Blow out your lamp, if you please."

They blew out the lamp, and I heard them laugh and chatter very softly in the shadows like school children. I resumed my walking alone on my deck, smoking my pipe. All the stars of the tropics were at their posts, big as little moons. I gazed at them breathing the air which smelled fresh and good.

I kept telling myself that those good little ones surely had guessed the truth, and I was all cheered up about it. It was safe to bet that one of the five *Directeurs* had thought better of it and recommended them to me. I did not exactly explain to myself why, because there are affairs of State that I have never understood. But anyway that was what I believed, and without knowing why, I was content.

I descended to my cabin and went to look at the letter under my old uniform. It had another face. It seemed to me it was laughing and its seals appeared rose-coloured. I no longer doubted its good-will and I made a little sign of friendship at it.

Nevertheless, I replaced my uniform coat over it. It annoyed me.

We forgot to look at it for several days, and we were gay. But when we neared the first degree latitude, we began to stop talking.

One fine morning I woke quite astonished at feeling no motion of the ship at all. I really never sleep except with one eye, as the saying goes, and as the rolling could not be felt, I opened both eyes. We had struck a dead calm, and it was under the first degree North latitude and at 27 degrees longitude. I stuck my nose out on the bridge. The sea was smooth as a bowl of oil. All the spread sails fell glued to the masts like collapsed balloons. I said right away:—I will have time to read you all right, looking across in the direction of the letter. I waited till evening, at sundown. Yet I had to come to it. I opened the clock and I quickly drew from it the sealed letter. Well, dear sir, I kept it in my hand for a quarter of an hour; I could not yet read it. Finally I told myself:—This is too silly! and I broke the three seals with one stroke of my thumb. And the big red seal I crushed to dust. After having read, I rubbed my eyes, believing I was mistaken.

I reread the letter entirely. I read it again. I started all over, beginning at the last line and

going up to the first. I did not believe it. My legs wobbled a bit under me; I sat down. There was a kind of twitching in the skin of my face. I rubbed my cheeks a little with rum. I put some in the hollow of my hands. I pitied myself to be as silly as all that. But that was only for an instant. I went up to take the air.

Laurette was so beautiful that day that I would not go near her: she wore a little white dress, very simple, arms bare to the neck, and her splendid thick hair fell the way she always wore it. She amused herself by dipping in the seas her other dress at the end of a rope, laughing as she tried to get hold of the wrack, a seaweed resembling bunches of grapes, which floats on the waters in the Tropics.

—"Come and look at the grapes! Come quickly!" she cried. And her husband leaned on her, and bent over, and never looked at the water, because he gazed at her with a deep tenderness.

I signalled the young man to come and talk to me on the quarter-deck. She turned around. I don't know how my face looked, but she dropped her rope. She grabbed him violently by the arm, and said to him:

—"Oh! don't go to him, he is so pale."

That might well be; there was reason for looking white. Nevertheless, he came to me on the quarter-deck. She looked at us, leaning against the main mast. We walked back and forth a long time without talking. I was smoking a cigar which tasted bitter, and I spat it out into the water. His eyes followed me. I took his arm. I was choking, on my word of honour, choking!

—"Ah well!" I said to him at last. "Tell me now, my young friend, tell me a little of your history. What the devil have you been doing to those dogs of lawyers who sit back there like five pieces of a King? It seems they are very angry with you! It's queer!"

He shrugged his shoulders and hung his head (with such a gentle air, poor boy!) and said to me:

—"Oh my God! Captain, nothing much really: three vaudeville ditties on the *Directoire,* that's all."

—"Not possible!" said I.

—"Oh my Lord! yes! The verses were not very good at that. I was arrested on the fifteenth of *Fructidor* and brought to Court, tried

on the sixteenth, and condemned to death first, and then to be deported, as a favour."

—"It's queer," said I. "The *Directeurs* are very touchy fellows. For the letter you know of orders me to shoot you."

He did not answer, and smiled, putting up a pretty good front for a chap of nineteen. He only looked at his wife, and wiped his forehead, from which rolled drops of sweat. I had as many on my face, I had—and other drops in my eyes.

I resumed:

—"It seems that those citizens did not care to do for you on land. They must have thought that out here it would not seem so much. But it is very sad for me. For no matter what a fine youngster you are, I cannot excuse myself from the orders. The death-warrant is there, all regular, and the order of execution, signed, sealed and delivered. There is nothing missing."

He saluted me most politely, and blushed.

—"I ask nothing, Captain," he said with a voice as mild as usual. "I would be distressed to have you fail of your duties. Only I would like to talk a little with Laure, and beg of you

to protect her in case she should survive me, which I don't believe."

—"Oh, as to that, you are right, my boy," I told him. "If it does not displease you, I will take her back to her family upon my return to France, and I shall only leave her when she will not want to see me any more. But, to my mind, you may be certain that she will never recover from the blow. Poor little woman!"

He took both my hands, pressed them, and said to me:

—"My dear Captain, you are suffering more than I from the task that lies before you. I can easily see that. But what can we do about it? I count on you to keep for her what little belongs to me, to protect her, to see that she receives what her old mother might leave her. May I? To guard her life, her honour, and also that her health is always taken care of. Look," he added more softly, "I must tell you that she is very delicate. Her lungs are often affected so that she may swoon several times a day. She must keep warmly covered always. In short, you will take the place of her father, of her mother and of myself as much as possible, won't you? If she might keep the rings her mother gave her, I would like it very much.

But if it is necessary to sell them for her, it will have to be done. My poor Laurette! Look how beautiful she is!"

Now as our conversation commenced to grow tender it bothered me. I began to pucker my eyebrows. I had been talking to him in a light vein so as not to weaken myself. But I could not keep it up any longer.—"Come, enough of that," I told him. "Between brave men all that is understood. Go talk to her, and let us hurry."

I pressed his hand in a friendly manner. And as he did not let go of mine and kept looking at me strangely:—"Ah now! if I may give you a hint," I added, "don't talk to her about that. We will arrange all without her knowing about it, nor you either, for that matter. That is my business."

—"Ah, that's different," he said; "I did not know . . . that will be better, indeed. Moreover, the farewells, the farewells! they weaken."

—"Yes, yes," I told him; "don't be a baby, that will be best. Don't embrace her, my friend, don't embrace her if you can help it, or you are lost."

I gave him another firm handshake and let him go. Oh, it was hard on me, all that was.

Upon my word, it seemed to me that he kept the secret well. For they walked together, arm in arm, along the edge of the deck, and picked up the rope and the dress one of the cabinboys had fished up.

Suddenly night came. It was the moment I had decided to take. But that moment has lasted for me until this day and I shall drag it through all my life like a ball and chain.

Here the old Major was compelled to stop. I took care not to talk, for fear of interrupting his thoughts. Striking his breast he resumed:

That moment, I tell you, I cannot yet understand it. I felt anger raising my hair and at the same time I don't know what it was that made me obey and drove me to it. I called the officers and told one of them:

—"Come on, lower a boat . . . for we are hangmen now! You'll put that woman in it, and you'll take her out to sea until you hear rifle shots. Then you'll come back." To obey a piece of paper! For it was only that after all! There must have been something in the

air that egged me on. I could see this young fellow from afar . . . oh! it was horrible to see! . . . kneeling before his Laurette, and kissing her knees and her feet. Don't you think I was in an awful plight?

I yelled like a madman:—"Separate them . . . we are all scoundrels! Separate them . . . The miserable Republic is a dead body! *Directeurs, Directoire,* they are the vermin on it! I quit the sea! I am not afraid of all your lawyers. Tell them what I am saying, what do I care?" Ah! I did worry a lot about them, that's a fact! I would have liked to have them in my power. I would have had them shot, all five of them, the rascals! Oh, I would have done it. I worried about my life no more than that water falling there, see . . . I worried a lot. . . . A life like mine . . . Bah! . . .

And the voice of the Major fell lower and lower and became as uncertain as his words. And he walked along biting his lips and puckering his eyebrows in terrible and ferocious distraction. He made little convulsive motions and beat his mule with the scabbard of his sabre as if he meant to kill it. What amazed me was to see the yellow hide of his face grow a deep

red. He unbuttoned and violently threw open his coat, baring his breast to the wind and rain. We continued walking like this amid a deep silence. I could see that he would talk no more of his own accord, and that I would have to make up my mind to question him.

"I understand," I said to him as if he had finished his story, "that after such a cruel adventure one's profession becomes a horror."

"Oh! the profession! Are you crazy?" he flung at me brusquely. "It is not the profession! Never shall a ship captain be obliged to be an executioner unless Governments of thieves and murderers are come, that take advantage of the habit a poor fellow has of blindly obeying, always obeying, obeying like a miserable machine, in spite of his heart."

At the same moment he pulled from his pocket a red handkerchief in which he burst out sobbing like a child. I stopped a moment to fix my stirrup, and remaining behind the cart, I went on in the rear for a while, feeling that he would be humiliated if I saw his abundant tears too plainly.

I had guessed rightly, for after about a quarter of an hour he too fell in behind his

poor carriage, and asked me if I had no razors in my portmanteau. To which I simply answered that having no beard as yet, razors would be quite useless to me. He did not insist, it had been merely to talk of something else. But I noticed with satisfaction that he came back to his story, for all at once he said to me:

"You have never seen a ship in your life, have you?"

"I have not seen any except in the Panorama at Paris," I answered, "and I have no great faith in the maritime knowledge I have gathered from that."

"Then you don't know what the bowsprit is, do you?"

"I have not an idea," I replied.

"It is a sort of beam projecting in front of the vessel, from which the anchor is thrown into the sea. When a man is shot, he is usually stood there," he added more softly.

"Ah, I understand, because from there he will fall into the sea."

He did not answer and began to describe all the kinds of boats a brig may carry and their disposition about the ship. And then, without order in his ideas, he continued his tale with

this assumed callousness, which long service infallibly imparts, because it is necessary to show to his inferiors one's scorn of danger, one's scorn of men, one's scorn of life, the scorn of death and the scorn of oneself. And all this hides under a hard covering, almost always a profound sensitiveness. The hardness of the fighting man is like an iron mask on a noble face, like a stone cell which holds a royal prisoner.

"The lowering of the boat took six men," he resumed. "They flung themselves into it and carried Laure along, before she had the time to cry out or talk. Oh! this is a business no honest man can console himself about when he has been the cause of it. No use talking, such a thing cannot be forgotten! . . . Ah! what beastly weather this is! What devil has made me tell all this! When I tell it, I cannot stop myself, I am gone. It is a story that makes me drunk like the wine of Jurançon. Ah, what rotten weather this is! My cloak is soaked through.

I was talking to you of this little Laurette, I believe! The poor woman! There are such clumsy people in the world! The officer was

fool enough to take the boat in front of the brig. After all, though, it can be truthfully said that everything cannot be foreseen. I had counted on the night to hide the business and I did not think of the flash of the twelve rifles fired in salvo. And, upon my word, from the boat she saw her husband drop into the sea, shot!

If there is a God above, He knows how the thing I am going to tell you came about. I do not. But it was seen and heard as I see you and hear you. At the moment of fire she put her hand to her head as if a bullet had struck her on the forehead, and sat down in that boat without swooning, without crying, without speaking, and came back to the brig when they wanted and the way they wanted. I went to her, and I talked to her long and as best I could. She seemed to listen to me and looked me in the face, rubbing her forehead. She did not understand, and her forehead was all red and her face all white. She trembled in all her limbs as if she were afraid of everybody. She has remained that way. She is still the same, the poor little thing! An idiot, or like an imbecile, or crazy, whatever you please. Never a word has been dragged from

her, unless it be that she says to take away what she has in her head.

From that moment on I became as sad as she and I sensed something inside of me which told me: *"Stand by her till the end of your days, and watch over her."* I have done that. When I came back in France, I requested to be transferred, with my rank, to the land troops. For I had come to hate the sea, because I had spilled innocent blood into it. I searched for Laure's relatives. Her mother had died. Her sister, to whom I brought the insane girl, would nothing of her, and offered to put her in the mad-house at Charenton. I turned my back upon them, and kept her with me.

He paused:

"Ah! my God! if you want to see her, my comrade, you have only to say so."

"Could she be inside there?" I asked him.

"Surely! Look! Wait! Whoa, whoa! You mule. . . ."

CHAPTER III

I CONTINUE MY JOURNEY

And he stopped his poor mule, that seemed delighted at my having put this question. At the same time he lifted the oilcloth off his little cart, as if to fix the straw which almost filled it, and I saw something very sad. I saw two blue eyes, huge eyes, beautifully shaped, set in a pale face, wasted and long, over which streamed blond hair, all matted. I really saw only those eyes that were all that remained of this poor woman, for the rest of her was dead. Her forehead was red. Her cheeks, hollow and white, showed bluish cheekbones. She crouched in the straw, so completely covered by it that her knees could only just be seen. She was playing dominoes on them all by herself. She looked at us a moment, trembled a long time, smiled at me a little, and resumed her game. It seemed to me that she was trying to understand how her right hand should beat her left.

"You see, she has been playing that game for a month, the battalion chief told me. To-morrow it may be perhaps another game which
ng time. Queer, is it not?"
ile he began to replace the oilcloth
ko which the rain had mussed up a

r Laurette!" I said. "You have lost the
for good!"

guided my horse close to the cart, and gave my hand. She gave me hers mechanically, miling very sweetly the while. I remarked with astonishment that on her long fingers she wore two diamond rings. I thought they were her mother's rings and I asked myself how, in their poverty, they could have been left to her. Not for all the world would I have remarked upon it to the old Major. But as his eyes followed mine, and saw them resting on Laure's fingers, he said to me with a sort of pride:

"They are pretty big diamonds, aren't they? They might have had their price occasionally, but I have not wanted her to part with them, poor child. When any one touches them, she cries. She never leaves them off. For the rest, she never complains. She even sews from time to time. I have kept my word

to her little husband and, truly, I do not regret it. I have never left her and I have told everywhere that she is my daughter who is insane. People have respected that. In the Army everything arranges itself better than one in Paris would think. She has been through all the wars of the Emperor with me, and I have always pulled her through. I have always kept her warm. What with straw and a little cart, that is never impossible. She was pretty well cared for. And I, as battalion commander with good pay, and with my pension of the Legion of Honour, and the monthly salary from Napoleon which was doubled at the time, I kept quite ahead of expenses, and she did not trouble me. On the contrary, her childishness sometimes gave the officers of the Seventh Light something to laugh about."

Then he went close to her and tapped her on the shoulder, the way he might have his little mule.

"Well, little girl! Say now, talk a little with the Lieutenant here. Come, nod your head a little."

She returned to her dominoes.

"Oh," he said; "she is a little cross to-day on account of the rain. But she never catches cold.

Crazy people never get sick; they are easy that way. On the Beresina and all through the retreat from Moscow she went bareheaded. All right, little girl, go on playing, don't you worry about us. Go, do what you please, Laurette."

She took his hand which he had laid on her shoulder, a big hand, black and wrinkled. Timidly she put it to her lips and kissed it like a poor slave. I felt my heart wrung by that kiss and I pulled my bridle violently.

"Shall we go on our way, Major?" I asked him. "Night will fall before we have reached Béthune."

With the tip of his sabre, the Major carefully scraped the yellow mud which clung to his boots. Then he climbed on the carriage step, and pulled over Laure's head the cloth hood of a little cape she wore. He took off his black silk muffler and put it around the neck of his adopted daughter; after which he kicked his mule, shrugged his shoulders, and said: "*En avant,* bad crew!" And we started on again.

Sadly the rain kept on pouring. Grey sky and grey earth stretched endlessly. A kind of wan light, a pale sun, all wet, sank behind big

windmills that did not turn. We fell back into a deep silence.

I looked at my old Major. He marched with big strides, with a vigour always sustained, while his mule seemed winded, and even my horse began to hang its head. The good fellow took off his shako from time to time to wipe his bald forehead and the few grey hairs on his head, or his heavy eyebrows, or his white whiskers from which the rain streamed. He did not trouble himself about the effect his tale might have on me. He made himself out neither better nor worse than he was. He had not deigned to picture himself. He was not thinking of himself and, after a quarter of an hour, he began in the same tone upon a much longer yarn about a campaign of Marshal Masséna, where he had formed his battalion into a square against I do not know which Cavalry. I did not listen to him, although he warmed up to demonstrate to me the superiority of the foot-soldier over the horseman.

Night fell. We did not travel fast. The mud became thicker and deeper. Nothing on the road, and nothing at its end! We halted at the foot of a tree, a dead tree, the only tree

along the way. He first cared for his mule, as I for my horse. Then he looked into the cart, like a mother into the cradle of her baby. I heard him say: "Come, little girl, pull this overcoat over your feet and try to sleep. Come, that's all right. She does not feel a drop of rain. Ah! the devil, she has broken my watch I had left around her neck! Oh, my poor silver watch! Ah well, it's all the same! Try to sleep, child. There is nice weather coming soon. Queer! she always has a fever. Mad women are like that. Look, here is some chocolate for you, my child."

He leaned the cart against the tree and we sat down under the wheels, sheltered from the eternal shower, sharing a little bread between us: a miserable supper.

"I am sorry that we have nothing but this," he said. "But it is better than horseflesh cooked under the ashes and with gunpowder on top, by way of salt, the way we ate it in Russia. The poor little woman, I surely have to give her the best I have. You see that I always put her by herself. She can't stand a man near her since the affair of the letter. I am old and she seems to believe that I am her father. In spite of that, she would strangle me if I as

much as tried to kiss her on the forehead. Education always leaves them something, it appears, for I have never noticed her forgetting to hide herself like a nun. Queer, is it not?"

While he was talking about her like this, we heard her sigh and say: *"Take away this lead! Take out this bullet!"* I rose. He made me sit down again.

"Sit still, sit still," he told me; "it is nothing. She says that all her life, because she constantly believes she feels a bullet in her head. That does not prevent her, though, from doing all she is told, and that very sweetly."

I kept silent, listening to him sadly. I began to figure that from 1797 to 1815, the year we were in, eighteen years had thus gone by for this man. I remained beside him silently for a long time, trying to account for this character and its destiny. Then, for no reason whatever, I shook his hand enthusiastically. He was surprised at that.

"You are a worthy man," I told him. He answered me:

"Eh! Why do you think so? Because of this poor woman? . . . You surely feel, my boy, that it was a duty. Self-denial is almost a second nature now."

And he talked to me some more about Masséna.

Next day, at sunrise, we arrived at Béthune, an ugly little fortified town, of which you would say that the ramparts, tightening their circle, have squeezed the houses together. Everything there was confusion. It was a moment of alarm. The townspeople began to take in the white flags from the windows and to sew on tricolour ones in their homes. The drummers were sounding the general alarm, the trumpeters blew "to horse," upon orders from the Duke de Berry. The long Picardy carts carried the *Cent-Suisses* and their baggage. The cannon of the *Gardes-du-Corps* running to the ramparts, the carriages of the princes, the squadrons of the Red Companies forming, all cluttered the town. The sight of the King's Gendarmes and the Musketeers made me forget my old travelling companion. I joined my Company and in the crowd I lost the little cart and its poor occupants. To my great sorrow I lost them for all time.

It had been the first time I had read to the very bottom of a true soldier's heart. This encounter had revealed to me a man's nature which was unknown to me, and which the coun-

try knows little and does not treat well. From that moment on I have placed it very high in my esteem. I have often since searched around me for some man similar to that one, and capable of this self-forgetfulness, this complete and heedless Abnegation of Self. Well, during fourteen years of Army life, it has been only in the Army, and particularly in the scorned and humble ranks of the infantry, that I have again found men of this antique type; men who push their sense of duty to its utmost consequences, having neither regrets for their obedience nor shame for their poverty; men of simple habits and speech, proud of their country's glory and unmindful of their own, joyfully confined to their obscurity and sharing with the unfortunate the black bread they pay for with their blood.

For a long time I did not know what had become of this poor battalion chief, the more so because he had not told me his name and I had not asked it of him. But in a café one day, in 1825 I think, an old infantry captain of the line to whom I described him while watching the parade, said to me:

"Why yes, I knew him, the poor devil. He was a brave man. He went down with a bullet

at Waterloo. He did have, in truth, a sort of crazy girl, whom he left with the baggage train. We took her to the hospital at Amiens on our way to join the Army of the Loir. She died there, raving mad, three days later."

"I can well believe it," I said to him; "she did not have her foster-father any more!"

"Ah bah! *Father?* What are you saying?" he added, with a look he wanted to make sly and lewd.

"I say that the roll-call is being sounded," I retorted, getting up and out.

And I too practised Abnegation.

BOOK III
THE VIGIL OF VINCENNES

BOOK III: THE VIGIL OF VINCENNES

CHAPTER I

RESPONSIBILITY

I WELL remember the consternation into which this story plunged my soul. Perhaps it instigated my slow cure for this disease of military enthusiasm. I felt at once humiliated for running the chance of criminality and for finding myself with a slave's sabre in my hand instead of a knight's sword. Many similar matters came to my knowledge, which blighted in my eyes this noble human species, which I had wished to see consecrated only to the defence of the country.

In the same way, during the era of the Terror, another ship captain had happened to receive, like the entire navy, the monstrous order from the "Committee of Public Welfare" to shoot the prisoners of war. He had had the misfortune of capturing an English vessel

and the greater misfortune of obeying the Government orders. Returning to port, he gave an account of his shameful execution, retired from the service and died from grief shortly after.

This captain had commanded the *Boudeuse,* frigate, which first made the trip around the world under orders of Monsieur de Bougainville, a relative of mine. This great seafarer wept over it, for the honour of his old ship.

Will the law never be made which in such events may reconcile Duty and Conscience? Is the public voice wrong which from generation to generation is raised to absolve and to honour the disobedience of the Vicomte d'Orte who replied to Charles IX when the latter ordered him to extend the Parisian St. Bartholomew Massacre to Dax:

"Sire, I have communicated the command of Your Majesty to his loyal subjects and men at arms. I have found among them none but good citizens and brave soldiers and not a single executioner."

And if he had reason to refuse obedience, how can we live under laws we consider reasonable for inflicting death upon him that would refuse this same blind obedience? We

admire the free arbiter and we kill him. The absurd cannot rule long this way. It will be indeed necessary to regulate the circumstances when deliberation shall be permitted to the man under arms, and the degree up to which the intelligence—and with it the exercise of Conscience and Justice—shall be left free. . . . It will be indeed necessary to come to this some day.

I do not conceal from myself that this is an extremely difficult question, one which strikes at the very root of discipline. Far from wishing to weaken this discipline I think it has need of corroboration among ourselves on many points and that, facing the enemy, the laws cannot be too Draconian. When the Army turns its iron breast upon the foe, it must march and act as one man. This must be. But when it has turned about, when it has facing it none but the mother country, it would be well to find, then at least, prudent laws which would permit it to have filial entrails. It is to be desired also that immovable bounds be fixed once for all to those absolute orders given to the Armies by the Sovereign Power, which has so often fallen into unworthy hands during our history. Let it never be pos-

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sible for some adventurers, arrived at Dictatorship, to transform into assassins four hundred thousand men of honour, by a law, like their reign, of a day.

True, I have often seen in the customs of the service that, thanks perhaps to French carelessness and the happy-go-lucky side of our character, as compensation and quite apart from the misery of military servitude, there reigned in the Armies a kind of freedom of mind which softened the humiliation of passive obedience.

Observing in every fighting man something of frankness and noble unconstraint, I have thought this due to a peaceful soul and a spirit relieved of the enormous weight of responsibility. I was very much of a child then and I felt little by little that this sense eased my conscience. I seemed to perceive in each general in chief a sort of Moses who had to render his terrible accounting to God alone, after having said to the sons of Levi: "Pass and pass again over the field; let each kill his brother, his son, his friend and whosoever be his next of kin. And twenty-three thousand men were killed," says Exodus XXXII:27. I knew the Bible by heart and this Book and I were so inseparable

that during the longest marches it followed me always.

One may see the first consolation it gave me. I thought I should have to have a great deal of ill luck ere one of my Moses in gold braid would order me to kill off my whole family. And it did not actually ever happen to me, as I had very wisely conjectured.

I thought also that, even though the impracticable peace of Abbé de St. Pierre should come to reign upon earth and should he himself be charged to regulate that universal liberty and equality, he would need for the task a few regiments of Levites, whom he could tell to gird on the sword and whose submission would call down upon them the blessings of the Lord.

In this way I sought to make my peace with the monstrous resignation of passive obedience, by considering to what divine source it harked back, and how all social order seemed to lean upon obedience. But I had need of many reasonings indeed and of many paradoxes to succeed in making it take some hold on my soul. I liked very much to impose it, but very little to submit to it. I found it admirably wise under my feet, but exceedingly absurd over my head. I have seen many men

since who reasoned the same way but who did not have the excuse I had at the time: I was a Levite only sixteen years old.

In those days I had not yet cast my eyes over the entire country of France, nor on that other country that surrounds it, called Europe; and still further, over the whole Country of all Humanity, the globe, which is fortunately growing smaller every day, squeezed together as it is in the hand of civilisation. I did not think how much lighter yet a fighting man's heart would be in his breast, if he should feel two men within himself, one of which could obey the other; if he knew that after his wholly rigorous part in war times he might have the right to a wholly beneficent and no less glorious part in peace; if at a certain fixed rank he might have the right of suffrage; if, after being long dumb in camp, he might have a voice in the city; if he were executer as the one, of the laws he would be making as the other, and if, to hide the blood on his sword, he might have the toga.

After all, it is not impossible that this may come to pass some day.

Truly, we are pitiless to wish that one man alone should be strong enough to answer for

this armed nation placed in his hands. It is a dangerous thing for the Governments themselves. For the present organisation, which hangs thus upon one single finger the entire electric chain of passive obedience, may in any given case make the complete overthrow of a State all to simple. Any half-formed and half-recruited revolution would have only to win over a Minister of War to become entirely full-fledged. All the rest would follow inevitably, according to our laws, without one single link being able to withdraw itself from the impulse emanating from on high.

No, —and I call to witness the bursts of outraged conscience of any man who has seen or who has caused the blood of his fellow citizens to flow—one head is not enough to bear so heavy a burden as that of so many murders. As many heads as combatants would be none too many. To be responsible for the blood law they execute it would be just that they should at least fully understand it. But the better institutions invoked here would themselves be but fleeting. For, once again, the days of Armies and War are numbered. Despite the words of a sophist I have elsewhere combated, it is not true that war, even against an alien, is

"divine." It is not true that "the earth is avid of blood." War is cursed of God and of the men, even, who wage it and who have a secret horror of it. And the earth cries to heaven only to ask for the fresh water of its rains and the pure dew of its clouds.

But it was not in the first flush of my youth given over wholly to action, that I would have been able to ask myself if there were no modern countries where the warrior was equal to the man of peace and not a man set apart from the family and placed as its enemy. I did not look into that which it might be well for us to take from the ancients on this point. Many projects for a more sensible organisation of the Armies have been born to no avail. Far from putting any of them into practice, or even showing them the light of day, the Power, such as it was, would probably always keep more and more aloof from them, because its interest lay in surrounding itself with gladiators in the ever threatening struggle. Nevertheless the thought will one day see light and take shape, just as does any necessary thought sooner or later.

In the present state, what fine sentiments are we preserving that might grow still finer

by the sentiment of a high personal dignity? I have gathered many examples in my memory. Around me, ready to supply me with them, were countless intimate friends, so gaily resigned to their heedless submission, so free-spirited in the thraldom of their bodies, that this heedlessness won me over for a moment, like them. And with it came the perfect serenity of the soldier and the officer; a serenity which is precisely that of the horse that nobly measures his stride between the bridle and the spur and that is proud of being in no wise responsible.

So let me be permitted to give such an example in the simple story of a brave man and a soldier's family of which I caught a glimpse. An example, gentler than the first, of these lifelong resignations, full of uprightness, good nature and decency, very common in our Army. The sight of it rests the spirit when one looks at the same time—as I did—into the world of fashion, from where one steps down joyfully to study more naïve customs, old-fashioned though they be.

Such as it is, the Army is a good book to open to know humanity better. In it one may learn to turn one's hand to anything, to

the lowliest as well as the most exalted things. The most delicate and wealthy are compelled to see poverty living close by and to live with it, to measure its coarse bread and to weigh its meat. Without the Army no such great lord's son would suspect how a soldier lives, grows, and waxes fat all year on nine pence a day and a pitcher of fresh water, carrying on his back a knapsack which, contents and container, has cost his country forty francs.

This simplicity of habits, this heedless and joyous poverty of so many young men, this rigorous and sane existence without false courtesy nor false sensitiveness, this manly bearing given to all, this uniformity of mind fashioned by discipline, are coarse ties of habit, but difficult to break nor lacking in a certain charm unknown to other professions. I have seen officers acquire a passion for this existence to such a point that they were unable to leave it even for a short time without becoming bored —not even to return to the most elegant and cherished customs of their lives. The regiments are men's convents, but nomadic convents. Everywhere they carry their customs stamped with seriousness, silence and restraint.

The vows of poverty and obedience are here indeed fulfilled.

The character of these recluses is as ineradicable as that of monks. I have never seen the uniform of one of my regiments without feeling my heart throb.

CHAPTER II

THE SCRUPLES OF HONOUR OF A SOLDIER

ONE evening in the summer of 1819, I was walking inside the fortress of Vincennes, where I was stationed, with Timoleon d'Arc, a lieutenant of the Guard like myself. We had taken the customary polygon walk, attended the ricochet shooting, peacefully listened to and told stories of war, discussed the Polytechnic School, its formation, its utility, its faults, as well as the sallow-complexioned men who had sprung from that geometric soil. The characteristic of the school sat upon Timoleon's brow too. Those who knew him will recall, like me, his regular, somewhat emaciated, face, his big black eyes with the arched eyebrows over them, and the sweet, rarely troubled seriousness of his Spartan countenance.

That evening he was very much preoccupied by our endless conversation upon the Laplace system of probabilities. I remember he

carried the book under his arm, that work which we held in great esteem and over which he was frequently tormented.

Night fell, or rather spread itself about us. A fine August night. I looked with pleasure at the chapel built by Saint Louis and at that crown of mossy, half-ruined towers which were the adornment of Vincennes at that time. The donjon rose above them like a king amidst his guards. The little crescents of the chapel glowed among the first stars, at the end of their long spires. The fresh, mellow odour of the woods came to us across the ramparts, and nothing down to the lawns of the batteries but breathed the fragrance of a summer's eve.

We sat down on one of the Louis XIV big guns and silently watched some young soldiers testing their strength by lifting each in turn a bomb at arm's length, while the others slowly crossed the drawbridge by twos or by fours, with all the languor of military idleness. The courts were filled with artillery caissons, open and loaded with powder, all ready for to-morrow's review.

Beside us, near the gate to the *bois,* an old artillery Adjutant kept opening and closing the small door of a little tower. It was a pow-

derhouse and arsenal belonging to the foot-artillery, filled with powder-kegs, arms and munitions of war. He saluted us in passing. He was a tall fellow, but a little stooped. His hair was sparse and white, his moustache white and thick. His looks were frank, robust and still fresh, happy, mild and content.

He held three big account books in his hand, on which he was checking long columns of figures. We asked him why he worked so late, contrary to his custom. He answered in the respectful, serene voice habitual to old soldiers that the next day would be general inspection day, at five in the morning. He was responsible for the powder and would not stop examining it, and going over his figures twenty times, so as to guard against the slightest reproach of negligence. He had wanted to take advantage of the last glimmer of daylight, too, because orders were rigid and forbade entering the powderhouse at night with a torch or even with a dark lantern. He regretted not having had time to look over everything; he still had to examine a few shells. He wished very much he could come back at night and he looked a little impatiently at the grenadier, who had been put

on sentry duty at the door and who was there to prevent him from re-entering it.

After having given us these details he knelt down and looked under the door to see that not a speck of powder remained. He feared lest the spurs or the steel on the officers' boots might ignite it and cause fire on the morrow.

"That is not what bothers me most," he said, getting up again. "It's my books." And he gazed at them regretfully.

"You are too scrupulous," said Timoleon.

"Ah! Lieutenant, when in the Guards one cannot be too much so of his honour. One of our sergeants blew out his brains last Monday for having been put in the guard-house. I have to set the example to the non-commissioned officers. Since I have served in the Guards, I have not had one reproach from my superiors and punishment would make me very miserable."

It is true that these brave soldiers chosen from among the flower of the army believed themselves dishonoured for the slightest fault.

"Go on with you, you are all puritans for honour," I told him, patting him on the shoulder.

He saluted and withdrew towards the bar-

racks where he was quartered. Then, with a naïveté of manners peculiar to the honest soldier breed, he came back to bring a handful of hempseed to a hen that was raising her twelve chicks under the old bronze cannon on which we were seated.

She was really the most charming hen I had ever known in my life. She was all white without a single spot. And this good fellow, with his big fingers that had been mutilated at Marengo and Austerlitz, had pasted a little red plume on her head and put a little silver necklace with a number plate on her breast. The good hen was proud of it and grateful, too. She knew that the sentries always saw to her being treated with due respect. So she was afraid of nobody, not even of a little suckling pig or a screech-owl that had been quartered near her under the next cannon.

The beautiful hen was the joy of the gunners. From all of us she received crumbs of bread and sugar while we were in uniform. But she had a horror of civilian dress and, not recognising us in that disguise, she would run from us with her brood to hide under the gun of Louis XIV. A magnificent gun it was, with the eternal sun engraved on it and the

mottoes *"Nec pluribus impar,"* and *"Ultima ratio Regum."* And it harboured a hen!

The good Adjutant spoke of her in endearing terms. She supplied fresh eggs to him and his daughter with unparalleled generosity. And he loved her so much that he had not had the heart to kill a single one of her chicks for fear of grieving her. While he was telling us of her, the drums and bugles started to sound the evening roll-call. The bridges were raised and the keepers made the chains rattle. We were not on duty and we went out by the gate into the *bois*. Timoleon, who had not stopped drawing angles on the sand with the tip of his sword, had got up from the cannon and regretted his triangle as much as I regretted my white hen and my Adjutant.

We turned to the left and followed the ramparts, and passing thus the green mound raised to the Duke d'Enghien above his bullet-riddled body and his head that was crushed with a flagstone. We bordered the moats and gazed at the little white path he had followed to arrive at his grave.

There are two kinds of men who can walk together for five hours at a stretch without talking. They are prisoners and officers. Con-

demned to see each other all the time, when all together each one is alone. We went on in silence, arms behind our backs.

By the light of the moon I remarked that Timoleon ceaselessly fingered a letter. It was a small letter of long, narrow size. I knew both its shape and its feminine author and I was used to seeing him dream a whole day over this fine, small and elegant handwriting.

And so we reached the village in front of the castle. We climbed the steps to our little white house. We were about to part on the landing before our adjoining apartments and I had not said a word. Only there did he suddenly speak to me:

"She absolutely wants me to tender my resignation. What do you think of it?"

"I think," I said, "that she is beautiful as an angel, because I have seen her. I think you adore her like a madman, because for two years I have seen you just as you have been this evening. I think that you have a quite comfortable fortune, judging by your horses and your retinue. I think that you have made a fine enough record to retire and that in peace times it is no great sacrifice. But I also think of one single thing——"

"What?" he asked, smiling a little bitterly because he guessed.

"She is married," I answered more seriously. "And you know it better than I do, my poor friend——"

"It's true," he said, "there is no future."

"And the service helps you to forget that sometimes," I added.

"Perhaps," he returned. "But it is not likely that my star should change in the Army. Mark that in my life I have never done anything good that has not remained unknown or been misinterpreted."

"Even if you will read Laplace every night that won't find a remedy for it," I said.

And I locked myself into my room to write a poem on the Iron Mask, which I called "The Prison."

CHAPTER III

THE LOVE OF DANGER

ISOLATION can not be too complete for men that are pursued, by I don't know what demon, with poetic illusions.

The silence was deep, and the shadows lay thick upon the towers of old Vincennes. The garrison had been asleep since nine in the evening. All lights were put out at ten by order of the drums. The only sounds to be heard were the voices of the sentries stationed on the ramparts, sending and repeating one after another their long and melancholy cry: "Sentry, watch out!"

The crows in the towers responded more sadly yet and, believing themselves no longer secure, flew higher up to the donjon. Nothing further could disturb me. And yet something did disturb me, which was neither noise nor light. I wanted to, and could not, write. I felt something in my thoughts, like a flaw in an

emerald. It was the idea that some one near me was awake, too, sleepless, restless, and deeply tormented. That troubled me.

I was sure that he had need of confiding himself and I had brusquely fled his confidences in the desire to give myself to my favourite thoughts. Now I was punished for it by the confusion of these very thoughts. They would not fly freely and broadly. And it seemed to me that their wings were weighted, drenched perhaps by a secret tear of a forsaken friend.

I rose from my armchair. I opened the window and began breathing the fragrant night air. A forest odour came to me over the walls, mixed a little with a faint smell of powder. That reminded me of the volcano over which three thousand men lived and slept in perfect security. On the great wall of the fortress, separated from the village by a road forty paces wide at most, I perceived a light cast by the lamp of my young neighbour. His shadow passed and repassed on the wall, and by his epaulettes I could see that he had not even thought of retiring.

It was midnight. I left my room brusquely and entered his. He was not at all surprised to see me and said at once that, if he was still

up, it was to finish reading Xenophon which interested him very much. But, as there was not a single open book in his room, and he still held his lady's little letter in his hand, I was not his dupe. But I pretended to be. We went over to the window and, trying to bring his ideas and mine together, I said to him:

"I, too, was at work, and I was trying to account for this sort of magnet that we find in the steel of a sword. It is an irresistible attraction that keeps us in the service in spite of ourselves and makes us wait all the time for something to happen or for a war. I don't know (and that's what I came to talk to you about) it would not be true to say and write that there lurks a passion in the Armies which is peculiar to them and gives them life. A passion which has nothing to do with love or glory or ambition. It is a sort of man to man fight with destiny, a struggle which is the source of a thousand delights unknown to the rest of mankind, and the inside triumphs of which are filled with magnificence. In short, it is the love of danger!"

"That is true," said Timoleon. I continued:

"What could it be that keeps the sailor at sea? What would console him in this boredom

of man seeing nothing but men? He leaves and bids the land farewell. Farewell to women's smiles, farewell to their love. Farewell to chosen friendships and the soft usages of life. Farewell to kind, old parents. Farewell to friendly Nature, to fields and trees and lawns, and pleasant scented flowers, to sombre rocks, to melancholy woods full of silent wild animals. Farewell to the big cities, to the perpetual works of the arts, to the sublime agitation of all the thoughts in life's idle hours, to the elegant, mysterious and passionate relations of the world. He bids good-bye to everything, and leaves. He goes to meet three enemies:—water, wind and man! And every minute of his life brings combat with one of them. This magnificent uneasiness delivers him from boredom. He lives in perpetual victory. It is a victory in itself to cross the ocean, and not to be swallowed up, foundering. It is one to go where he wills and to plunge into the arms of adverse winds. It is one to run before the storm and to make it follow after like a valet. It is one to sleep at sea and to build his study room upon it. He goes to bed, with the sense of his kingship, on the back of the ocean, like Saint Jerome on his lion, and

enjoys the solitude, which is at the same time his spouse."

"It is wonderful," said Timoleon. And I noticed that he put the letter down on the table.

"And it is love of danger that nurtures him, that causes him never to be discouraged an instant, to feel himself a combatant with an end in view. We always need a struggle. If we were on a campaign, you would not suffer so much."

"Who knows?" he replied.

"You are as happy as you can be. You cannot progress in your happiness. That kind of happiness is a veritable deadlock."

"Too true! Too true!" I heard him murmuring.

"You can't get away from the fact that she has a young husband and a child, and you can gain no greater liberty than you already have. Therein lies your torment!"

He wrung my hand: "And always be obliged to lie," he added. "Do you believe we will have a war?"

"I don't believe it at all," I answered.

"If I only knew whether she is at the ball

to-night! I had particularly forbidden her to go."

"I would have noticed very well that it is midnight, without your saying that," I told him. "You have no need of Austerlitz, my friend; you are sufficiently busy. You will have to dissemble and lie for several years to come. Good-night."

CHAPTER IV

THE FAMILY CONCERT

WHEN I was leaving to retire, I stopped, my hand on his doorknob. I was amazed to hear music quite near by, coming from the castle itself. Listening at the window it seemed to us that it was made by two men's voices, a woman's voice and a piano. For me it was a sweet surprise at that hour of the night.

I proposed to my comrade that we go and listen to it closer by. The small draw-bridge, parallel to the big one, and meant to let the governor and the officers pass during a part of the night, was still down. We re-entered the fortress and, roaming through the courts, we were guided by the sound beneath the open windows I recognised as those of the good old artillery Adjutant.

Those big windows were on the ground floor and stopping in front of them we discovered, at the back of the room, the simple family of that honest soldier.

At one end of the room stood a small mahogany piano, with old brass ornaments. The Adjutant (quite old and modest as he had seemed to us at first) was sitting at the piano and playing a sequence of chord accompaniments and simple modulations, but all harmoniously linked together. His eyes looked upward, and he had no music before him. His mouth was half open with delight under his long, thick white moustache. His daughter stood at his right, and was just going to sing or had just been interrupted. For she looked at him anxiously, her mouth still half open, like himself. To his left, a young sergeant of the light artillery of the guard, dressed in the severe uniform of that fine corps, stood looking at this young woman as if he had not yet stopped listening to her.

Nothing so serene as their attitudes, nothing so decorous as their bearing, nothing so happy as their faces. The rays that fell from above upon these three foreheads did not light a careworn expression there. And the finger of God had written nothing there save goodness, love and modesty.

The clink of our swords against the wall warned them of our presence. The good man

saw us and his bald forehead reddened with surprise, and I think too, with satisfaction. He rose hastily and taking one of the three candelabra that lighted him, came to open the door for us and made us sit down. We begged him to continue his family concert. And with a noble simplicity, without excusing himself or asking for our indulgence, he said to his children:

"Where were we?"

And the three voices rose in chorus in inexpressible harmony.

Timoleon listened and remained motionless. As for myself, shielding my head and my eyes, I began to dream with an emotion which was sad, I don't know why. Their singing carried my spirit into regions of tears and sweet melancholy. And pursued, perhaps, by the importunate thought of my evening's work, I changed into shifting images the shifting modulations of the voices.

They were singing one of those Scotch choruses, one of the ancient melodies of the bards which the clear echoes of the Orkneys still carry. For me this melancholy chorus rose slowly and vanished suddenly like the mists of the mountains of Ossian. Those

mists that form on the foaming froth of the torrents of Arven, thickening slowly, billowing and growing as they rise with a countless mass of tortured phantoms tattered by the winds. They are warriors forever dreaming, helmet in hand, whose tears and blood fall drop by drop in the black waters of the rocks.

They are pallid beauties whose hair flows out behind like the rays of a faraway comet, and melt on the moist breast of the moon. They pass quickly and their feet disappear wrapped in the vaporous folds of their white robes. They have no wings, yet they fly. They fly holding harps. They fly with lowered eyes and mouth half opened, innocently. They utter a cry in passing and are lost as they rise into the soft light that beckons them.

They are aerial ships that seem to pound on dark coasts and plunge into thick waves. The mountains bend to weep over them and the black mastiffs raise their deformed heads and howl a long time as they look at the disk that trembles in the sky, while the sea shakes the white columns of the Orkneys that are ranged like the pipes of a giant organ and that pour over the ocean a piercing harmony, prolonged

a thousandfold in the cavern in which the waves are imprisoned.

Thus the music translated itself into sombre images in my soul which, still very young, was open to all sympathies and as though in love with its imaginary sorrows.

In truth, to feel them in this way was to return to the thought of him who had invented these sad and powerful songs. The happy family even experienced the strong emotion they imparted, and a deep vibration at times made the three voices shake.

The singing stopped and a long silence followed. The young woman leaned on her father's shoulder, as if tired. She was tall and a little bowed as if with weakness. She was thin and seemed to have grown too rapidly, and her chest, a little emaciated, seemed to have been affected by it. She kissed the bald, broad and wrinkled forehead of her father and yielded her hand to the young sergeant who pressed it to his lips.

As I was particularly anxious not to show my inward musings I contented myself with saying coldly, and abstrusely:

"May Heaven grant long days and all manner of blessings to them that have the gift of

rendering music literally! I cannot admire enough the man who finds in one symphony the fault of its being too Cartesian, and in another that of leaning towards the system of Spinosa, who waxes eloquent over the pantheism of a trio, and the utility of an overture for the betterment of the masses. If I were lucky enough to know why one flat more or less on the staff can make a quartet for flute and bassoon more partisan of the *Directoire* than of the Consulate or the Empire, I would cease talking—I would sing eternally: I would crush beneath my feet words and phrases which at the most are good for some hundred districts —while I should have the good fortune to transmit my ideas most clearly to the entire universe, thanks to my seven notes; but deprived as I am of this science, my musical conversation would be so limited that the only thing left for me to do is to express to you, in our common tongue, the satisfaction that the sight of your person procures me, and the spectacle of the perfect though simple harmony which reigns in your midst. It is marked to such a degree that what pleases me most about your little concert is the pleasure you take in it yourselves. Your spirits seem more beauti-

ful to me than the most beautiful music heaven has ever heard rising to it from our miserable and forever groaning earth."

Effusively I gave my hand to the good father and he shook it with an expression of grave thankfulness. He was only an old soldier. But in his speech and his manner there was I don't know what of the old amenities of the world. The following explained it to me.

"This, Lieutenant," he said to me, "is the life we lead here. We sing for a rest, my daughter, myself and my future son-in-law."

He gazed at the splendid young people with a tenderness all radiant with happiness.

"Here," he added in a more serious manner, pointing out a small portrait, "my daughter's mother."

We looked towards the whitewashed wall of the modest room, and there we saw a miniature which represented truly the most graceful and fresh little peasant girl Greuze had ever endowed with big blue eyes and cherry lips.

"It was a very great lady who was good enough once to paint that portrait," the Adjutant told me, "and it has quite a curious history, this wedding dowry of my poor little wife."

And yielding to our long entreaties to tell of his marriage, he gave us this account over three glasses of green absinth which he took pains to offer us as a ceremonious preliminary.

CHAPTER V

HISTORY OF THE ADJUTANT; THE CHILDREN OF MONTREUIL AND THE MASON

You must know, Lieutenant, that I was raised in the village of Montreuil by the curate of Montreuil himself. He had made me learn a few notes of plain song during the happiest time of my life: the time when I was a choir boy, when I had big, fat, pudgy cheeks that everybody pinched in passing, and a clear voice, blond hair, a blouse and wooden shoes. I don't look at myself often but I fancy I hardly look much like that now.

Nevertheless, it was thus I used to be, and I could not be got away from a kind of wheezy harpsichord the priest had in his home. I tuned it with quite a true ear, and the good Father who had once been noted at Notre Dame for his singing and teaching of the *faux-bourdon* made me learn an ancient solfeggio. When he was pleased with me he

would pinch my cheeks until they were blue, and would say to me:

—"Look here, Mathurin, you are only the son of a peasant couple, but if you know your catechism and your solfeggio well, and you stop playing with the rusty rifle in the house, a music master might be made of you. Keep at it, my lad."

That gave me good heart and I banged away on the poor keyboard whose sharps were almost all mute!

At certain hours I was allowed to run and play. But the pleasantest recreation was to go and sit at the end of the park of Montreuil and eat my bread with the masons and workmen that were busy building a small music pavilion for the Queen, on the Avenue de Versailles, a hundred paces from the barrier.

A charming spot it was that you may see on the right of the road going to Versailles. At the farthest end of the park of Montreuil, in the middle of a lawn surrounded by big trees, if you will notice a pavilion that looks like a mosque and a bonbonnière, it is that which I went to watch building.

I used to go hand in hand with a little girl of my own age, Pierrette by name. The

priest used to make her sing, too, because she had a fine voice. She would take along a big slice of bread and jam given her by her mother, the priest's servant, and together we would go to watch the building of the little house the Queen was having made as a gift to the Princess Royal.

Pierrette and I were about thirteen years old. She was already so pretty that people would stop her on the road to pay her compliments, and I have seen fine ladies step from their coaches to talk to her and kiss her! When she had on a red frock drawn up at the pockets and tight in the waist, it was easy to see what a beauty she would be some day. She never gave it a thought, though, and she loved me like a brother.

We had always gone out hand in hand since we were little children, a custom that became so natural, that all my life I never gave her my arm. Our habit of going to visit the workmen made us the acquaintance of a young stone-cutter, older than we by some eight or ten years. He used to make us sit down on a stone or on the ground beside him and when he would have a big stone to cut, Pierrette would throw water on his saw, and I would

take hold of the other end to help him. And so he became my best friend in the world.

He was a most peaceable character, very quiet, sometimes a little jolly, but that very rarely. He composed a little song on the stones he cut, on their being harder than the heart of Pierrette. And he played with a thousand variations on these words Pierre, Pierrette, Pierrerie, Pierrier and Pierrot—and it made us laugh all three. He was a big fellow and still growing, quite pale and awkward, with long arms and long legs. Sometimes he seemed not to be thinking of what he was doing. He liked his trade, he said, because he could earn his day's wages conscientiously, while having thought of other matters till sundown.

His father, an architect, had ruined himself so thoroughly, how I don't know, that the son had to start at the bottom, and he had very serenely resigned himself to it. When he was cutting a big block, or sawing it lengthwise, he would always start a little song in which there would be a complete little story that he built up as he went along, for twenty or thirty verses, more or less.

Sometimes he would tell me to walk ahead

CHAPTER VII

THE ROSE LADY

"It seems to me very certain, my dear children," he said, turning to his daughter, "that Providence has deigned to take care in ordaining my life the way it has been. In the countless storms that have disturbed it, I may say in the face of all the world, that I have never failed to trust in God and await His help, after having helped myself with all my might. And so I can tell you that walking on troubled waters I have never deserved being called 'man of little faith' as was the Apostle. And when my feet sank I lifted up my eyes, and I was succoured."

(Here I glanced at Timoleon. "He is a better man than we," said I very softly.) He continued:

The curate of Montreuil was very fond of me. He treated me with such paternal friend-

ship, that in spite of his recalling them frequently, I quite forgot that I sprang from humble peasants who both had been carried away by smallpox almost at the same time, and whom I had never seen. At sixteen I was uncouth and stupid but I knew a bit of Latin, a lot of music, and I was quite handy at all manner of garden work. My life was very pleasant and very happy, because Pierrette was always with me, and I was always gazing at her when working, though I did not have much to say to her.

One day when I was pruning one of the beeches in the park and tying up a small bundle of sticks, Pierrette said to me:

—"Oh! Mathurin, I am frightened. There are two beautiful ladies coming toward us from the end of the lane. What are we going to do?"

I looked, and actually saw two young ladies walking swiftly on the dry leaves, and who did not go arm in arm. One was a bit taller than the other, and dressed in a little rose-coloured silk dress. She almost ran, and the other, while accompanying her, walked almost behind her. Instinctively I was taken with a fear like the poor peasant I was, and I said to Pierrette:

—"Let us run away!"

But, pshaw! We did not have the time. And what increased my fears was to see the lady in rose-colour motion to Pierrette, who grew red all over and dared not move, and grabbed my hand to reassure herself. I took off my cap, and leaned my back against the tree, all overcome.

When the rose-coloured lady was fully upon us, she made straight for Pierrette and without formality took her by the chin to show her to the other lady, and said:

—"Well, what did I tell you? It's my complete milkmaid's costume for Thursday. The pretty child! Dear, you will give all your clothes, just the way you are wearing them now, to the people I will send for them, won't you? I shall send you mine in exchange."

—"Oh! Madame," said Pierrette drawing back.

The other young lady started to smile, a soft, tender and melancholy smile, whose touching expression is uneffaceable in my memory. She came forward, her head bent a little and taking Pierrette gently by the arm, she told her to come closer, and that everybody had to do the bidding of the other lady.

—"Don't go and change a thing in your costume, my little pretty," resumed the rose-coloured lady, threatening her with a little gold-headed malacca cane she held in her hand. —"That big fellow there will make a soldier, and I will marry you two."

She was so beautiful that I well remember the incredible temptation I felt to kneel at her feet. You will laugh at that and I have often laughed over it myself since. But if you had seen her, you would have understood what I am saying. She had the appearance of some very good little fairy.

She spoke fast and gaily, and giving Pierrette a little pat on the cheek, she left us there together all dazzled and stupefied, not knowing what to do, and we saw the two ladies, following the lane towards Montreuil, plunge into the park behind the little wood.

Then we two looked at each other, and still hand in hand, we went home to the priest. We didn't say a word, but we were very happy.

Pierrette was all red, and I hung my head. He asked us what was the matter with us. I told him with great seriousness:

—"Monsieur le Curé, I want to be a soldier."

It nearly knocked him over; he who had taught me solfeggio.

—"What? You want to leave me, my dear boy?" he said to me. "Oh! my God! Pierrette, what have they been doing to him, that he wants to be a soldier? Don't you love me any more, Mathurin? Don't you love Pierrette any more either? What have we done to you, tell me? And what about the fine education I have given you? That was time wasted, surely. But answer me, you wicked lad!" he added, shaking me by the arm.

I scratched my head, and I said, looking at my sabots all the while:

—"I want to be a soldier."

Pierrette's mother brought the priest a big glass of cold water, because he had grown all red, and then she began to cry.

Pierrette cried too and dared not speak a word. But she was not angry with me, for she was very well aware it was to marry her that I wanted to go away.

At that moment, two imposing powdered lackeys entered with a chambermaid that looked like a lady and they asked if the little girl had prepared the clothes the Queen and

Madame the Princess de Lamballe had asked her for.

The poor curé rose but was so troubled that he could not keep on his feet for a moment. Pierrette and her mother shook so that they dared not open the little casket sent them in exchange for the frock and kerchief, and they went to the undressing almost as if they were going to be shot.

Alone with me, the priest asked me what all had happened, and I told him the way I told you, only a bit more briefly.

—"And so it is because of that you want to go away, my son?" he asked, taking my two hands. "But think of it, the greatest Lady in Europe did not speak that way to a little peasant like yourself except absent-mindedly, and she did not even know what she was saying to you. If she were to be told that you have taken her words for a command, or for a horoscope, she would say that you are a big booby, and that you may be a gardener all your life for all she cares. What you will earn gardening and what you will earn giving singing lessons will be your own, my boy. While what you will earn in a regiment will not belong to you, and you will have a thousand opportunities of

spending it for pleasures forbidden by religion and good morals. You will lose all the good principles I have given you and you will make me blush for you. You will come back (if you come back at all) with a character other than the one you have received at birth. You are nice, modest, quiet. You will become rough, impudent and blustering. Little Pierrette surely won't stand for being the wife of a poor good-for-nothing, and her mother would prevent her even if she wanted to. And I, what can I do for you, when you forget Providence altogether? You will forget, you'll see, you will forget Providence! I assure you you will wind up that way."

I remained sulking, eyes fixed on my wooden shoes and eyebrows puckered, and I answered, scratching my head:

—"All the same, I want to be a soldier!"

The good priest did not insist longer, and throwing the door wide open, he showed me the road, sadly. I understood his meaning and stepped out. I would have done the same, in his place, most certainly. And that's what I think at present, but that day I did not think so. I put my cotton cap on one ear, turned

up the collar of my blouse, grabbed my stick and made straight for a little inn on the Avenue of Versailles, without saying good-bye to a soul.

CHAPTER VIII

THE FIRST RATE POSITION

In the little inn I found three braves in gold-laced hats, white uniforms with pink lapels, black waxed moustaches, and hair all powdered like hoarfrost, who talked as fast as quack medicine venders. These three braves were honest crimps. They told me I would only have to sit down at their table with them to get the right idea of the perfect happiness I would eternally and forevermore taste in the Royal-Auvergne Regiment. They gave me chicken to eat, venison and partridges too, and Bordeaux wine to drink, and champagne, and excellent coffee. They swore to me on their honour that in the Royal-Auvergne I would never have any other.

I have seen since, indeed, that they spoke the truth.

They swore to me also—for they swore to everything — that in the Royal-Auvergne

people enjoyed the sweetest freedom; that its mere troopers were incomparably happier than the captains of other regiments. That the pleasantest society of men and fine ladies was to be had, and that they made lots of music and, particularly, that any one playing the piano would be greatly appreciated. This last circumstance clinched my decision.

So the next day I had the honour of being a private in the Royal-Auvergne. It was quite a fine regiment, it's true. But I did not see Pierrette nor Monsieur le Curé. At dinner I asked for chicken, and they gave me that lovely mess of potatoes, mutton and bread to eat, which was called, is called, and no doubt always will be *ratatouille*. They made me understand the position of a soldier without weapons with such grand perfection that afterwards I served as a model to the man who drew up the plates of the regulations of 1791. You know those regulations, Lieutenant; they are a masterpiece of precision. They taught me the soldier's manual and the platoon exercises so as to execute the charges in twelve tempos, the double quick charges and the charges at will, counting or not counting the movements. They taught me as perfectly as the strictest

corporal of the Prussian King, Frederick the Great, whom our elders still remembered with the affection of people that love those that have beaten them. They did me the honour to promise me that, if I behaved well, I would in the end be admitted to the first company of Grenadiers. Pretty soon, I, too, had a powdered pigtail, hanging nobly down my white-coated back. But I never saw either Pierrette, or her mother, or the priest of Montreuil any more. And I did not play any music.

One fine day when I was consigned to quarters—in these very barracks we are in now—for having made three mistakes in the exercises at arms, I was put in position of first rank fire, one knee on the pavement. A brilliant and superb sun shone full in my face. I was forced to aim my musket at it, in perfect immobility, until exhaustion made me bend the small of my arms. I was encouraged to hold up my weapon by the presence of a strapping corporal who would push up my bayonet with the butt of his gun from time to time, whenever it drooped. It was a nice little punishment, invented by Monsieur de Saint Germain.

I had been applying myself for twenty minutes to attaining the highest degree of petrifac-

tion possible in that attitude, when down the barrel of my musket I saw the kind and peaceable face of my dear Michel, the stone-cutter.

—"You come just at the right time, my friend," I said to him, "and you would be doing me a great service if you would be so kind as to put your stick under my bayonet for a moment, when nobody is looking. My arms would feel the better for it, and your cane would not be any the worse."

—"Ah, Mathurin, my friend," said he to me, "you are properly punished for having left Montreuil. You have no longer the advice and the lectures of the good priest and you are going to forget completely the music you loved so much. And the music at parade surely will not make up for it."

—"Just the same," I said, lifting the end of my gun barrel away, off his cane, just for pride, "just the same, each one of us has his own way of thinking!"

—"You won't be training the fruit trees against the wall and grow the fine Montreuil peaches with your Pierrette, who is quite as fresh and downy as the peaches."

—"No matter," I repeated, "I have my own ideas."

—"You'll be spending a lot of time on your knees shooting at nothing with a wooden stone, before being as much as a corporal."

—"No matter!" I repeated once again. "No matter, if I advance slowly it is advancing just the same. All things come to him who waits, as the saying goes, and when I am a sergeant, I will be somebody, and I will marry Pierrette. A sergeant, that's a lord, and all honour to a lord!"

Michel groaned.

—"Ah, Mathurin, Mathurin!" he said to me, "you have not any sense. You have too much pride and ambition, my young friend. Would you not rather have a substitute, if somebody paid him for you, and come home to marry your little Pierrette?"

—"Michel! Michel!" I answered, "you have been spoiled in the world. I don't know what you are doing, but you don't look to me like a mason any more, because, instead of a blouse, you are wearing a black silk coat. You surely would not have spoken to me like this in the days when you were constantly repeating: 'Everybody must make his own way.' I don't want to marry her on somebody else's money, and I am making my own way as you see.

Moreover, it is the Queen who has put this into my head, and the Queen cannot be wrong in judging what is best to do. She said herself: 'He will make a soldier, and I will marry them.' She did not say: 'He will come back after having been a soldier.' "

—"But," Michel insisted, "if the Queen should happen to want to give you the wherewithal to marry her, would you take it?"

—"No, Michel, I would not take it, if by some impossibility she would want to give it."

—"And if Pierrette herself should earn her dower?" he resumed.

—"Yes, Michel, then I would marry her right off," said I.

The good fellow looked all mollified.

—"All right," he said, "I shall tell that to the Queen."

—"Are you crazy, or are you a servant in her palace?"

—"Neither one nor the other, Mathurin, although I don't cut stone any more."

—"Then what are you doing?" I asked.

—"Oh! I am writing some plays with paper and a pen."

—"Pshaw!" I retorted, "is it possible?"

—"Yes, my boy, I am writing some little

plays, very simple and easily understood. I'll show them to you."

"As a matter of fact," said Timoleon, interrupting the Adjutant, "the works of the good Sedaine are not based on very difficult subjects. There is not one hypothesis on the finite or the infinite, or ultimate causation, or the association of thought and individual identity to be found among them. Kings and queens are not killed by poison or on the scaffold. His works don't go by resounding names encompassed with their philosophic exemplifications. But they have names like 'Blaise,' and 'The Lost Lamb,' 'The Gardener and his Lord,' 'The Deserter,' 'The Unexpected Wager.' Those are very simple folk, that speak the truth, that are philosophers without knowing it, like Sedaine himself. I think he is bigger than they have made him out to be."

I did not answer.

The Adjutant went on:

—"Well, all the better!" I told him. "I like to see you work at those as well as at your stones."

—"Ah! what I was building is worth more

than what I am constructing now. The former did not pass out of style and stood up longer. But in falling it might crush somebody. While at present, if what I am doing should fall, nobody will be crushed."

—"No matter, I always rest easy," I said. That is to say, I meant to say it. For the Corporal just then landed such a terrific blow on the cane of my friend Michel, that it was sent flying down there, look—'way over there, near the powder house.

And at the same time he gave the sentry six days in the guard-house, for having allowed a civilian in.

Sedaine understood he had to go. He quietly picked up his cane and going out on the side toward the woods, he said to me:

—"I assure you, Mathurin, that I shall tell the Queen about all this."

CHAPTER IX

A SÉANCE

My little Pierrette was a beautiful little girl, of strong, serene and true character. She was not easily disconcerted, and since she had spoken with the Queen, she did not let herself be scolded readily. She knew how to tell Monsieur le Curé and his servant that she wanted to marry Mathurin, and she stayed up nights to sew on her trousseau, just as if I had not been cast out for a long time, if not forever.

One day (it was Easter Monday, she always remembered, poor Pierrette, and she often told me so) one day, then, as she was sitting in front of Monsieur le Curé's door working and singing as if nothing were the matter, she saw a beautiful carriage approaching at a quick gait; the six horses trotting on the Avenue at a marvellous pace were mounted by little pink and powdered postilions who were so very tiny that at a distance only their huge riding boots could be seen. They wore big

bunches of flowers on their jabots, and the horses had flowers at the ears.

And then! Did not the outrider, who ran ahead of the horses, stop exactly in front of the door of Monsieur le Curé! And the coach was kind enough to stop there also, and deigned to be opened wide. Nobody was inside. While Pierrette looked on with big eyes, the outrider took off his hat most politely and asked her to please step into the carriage.

Perhaps you think Pierrette hesitated? Not at all! She was too sensible for that. She simply took off her two wooden shoes, which she left on the doorstep, put on her shoes with the silver buckles, folded her work neatly, and climbed into the carriage, leaning on the arm of the footman, as if she had never done anything else in her life. You see, since she had changed dresses with the Queen, she was no longer afraid of anything.

She often told me of the two great frights she had had in the carriage: the first, because they were going so fast that the trees of the Avenue de Montreuil seemed to be running after each other like crazy things; the second, because it seemed to her that, sitting down on the white cushions of the carriage, she would

leave on them a blue and yellow spot from the colour of her petticoat. She tucked it up into her pocket and stayed stiff upright on the edge of the cushion, not at all troubled by her adventure, shrewdly guessing that under such circumstances it is wise to do what everybody wishes, frankly and without hesitating.

Keenly understanding her proper place, thanks to her sweet and happy nature that was inclined towards the good in everything, she permitted the outrider to give her his arm in perfect manner and lead her to Trianon, and into the gilded apartment where she took care to walk on the tips of her toes, out of regard for the parquet floors of inlaid wood, which she was afraid of scratching with the nails of her shoes.

When she entered the last room, she heard a joyous little laugh from two very low voices. That did intimidate her a trifle at first and made her heart beat faster. But after entering she was quickly reassured. It was only her friend, the Queen.

Madame de Lamballe was with her. But she was sitting in a bay window before a desk for miniature painting. On the green cover of the desk was an ivory all prepared; near the

ivory were brushes; near the brushes, a glass of water.

—"Ah! there she is!" said the Queen with a holiday air, and she ran to take both Pierrette's hands.

—"How fresh she looks and how pretty! What a pretty little model she will make you! Come on, don't miss her, Madame de Lamballe! Sit down there, child!"

And beautiful Marie-Antoinette made her sit down on a chair almost forcibly. Pierrette was altogether dumbfounded, and her chair was so high that her little feet hung down and dangled.

—"Why look how well she holds herself," continued the Queen. "She does not need to be told twice what is wanted of her. I wager she has good sense. Hold yourself up straight, dear child, and listen to me. Two gentlemen are coming here. Whether you know them or not doesn't matter and does not concern you. You must do everything they tell you to do. I know you sing, so you will sing. When they tell you to come in and go out, to come and go—you will come in and go out, you will come and go—just as they tell you. Do you understand? All this is for your own good. Madame

and I will help them to teach you something I know, and for our trouble we only ask you to pose for Madame an hour every day. That does not distress you too much, does it?"

Pierrette did not answer but blushed and paled at each word. But she was so happy that she would have liked to embrace the little Queen like a chum.

As she was posing, eyes turned towards the door, she saw two men come in. One was stout, the other tall. When she saw the tall one she could not help crying out: "Why it's the . . ."

But she bit her finger to keep still.

—"Well, what do you think of her, gentlemen?" asked the Queen. "Was I mistaken?"

—"Isn't it Rose herself?" said Sedaine.

—"A single note, Madame," said the stouter of the two, "and I will know if she is the Rose of Monsigny, as well as the Rose of Sedaine here."

—"Come, little one, repeat this scale," said Grétry, singing *do, re, mi, fa, sol.*

Pierrette repeated it.

—"She has a divine voice, Madame," said he.

The Queen clapped her hands, and jumped.

—"She will earn her dower," she cried.

CHAPTER X

A BEAUTIFUL EVENING

WITH this the good Adjutant took a sip from his little glass of absinth, urging us to follow his example. Then, having wiped his white moustache with a huge, red handkerchief and twirling the ends for an instant with his big fingers, he went on.

If I knew how to prepare surprises, Lieutenant, the way they do in books, and maintain the suspense about the ending of a story, holding a high hand over my audience, making them get a foretaste of it, and then snatching it away again, and finally letting them munch it down altogether—then I might find a new way of telling you the sequel of this story. But I proceed "from thread to needle," just as simply as my life has been from one day to another. I will tell you that since the day my poor Michel came to see me here, at Vincennes, and found me in the position of first rank fire, I

grew thin in a ridiculous manner, because I did not hear our little family in Montreuil spoken of any more. And I had come to believe that Pierrette had forgotten me altogether.

The Auvergne regiment had been at Orleans for three months and homesickness began to overtake me. I grew more yellow every day, and I could no longer carry my musket. My comrades began to look down on me, the way they do here on any sickness; you know it.

There were some who scorned me because they thought I was very ill. Others thought that I made believe. In this latter case, all I could do would have been to die to prove that I had spoken the truth. For I could not get well again at once, nor sick enough to keep to my bed; a ticklish position it was.

One day an officer of my company sought me out and said to me:

—"Mathurin, you who know how to read, read this a bit."

And he took me to the Place Jeanne d'Arc, a square very dear to me, where I read a big play-bill on which this was printed:

BY ORDER

Next Monday, special performance of "Irene," a new play by M. de Voltaire, and of "Rose et Colas," by M. Sedaine, music by M. Monsigny, for the benefit of Mademoiselle Colombe, celebrated singer of the Comédie-Italienne, who will appear in the second piece. Her Majesty the Queen has deigned to promise that she will honour the performance with her presence.

—"Well!" I said, "Captain, what can that be to me?"

—"You are a good boy," he answered. "You are a good-looking boy. I shall have you curled and powdered to make you a little more presentable, and you will be put sentry at the door of the Queen's box."

So said so done. The hour of the performance come, there I was in the corridor, in the full dress uniform of the Auvergne regiment, on a blue carpet, amidst garlands of flowers festooned about everywhere, and full-blown lilies on every step of the theatre stairways. The manager ran everywhere at once, looking very joyful and anxious. He was a little man, red

and fat, dressed in a skyblue silk coat, with a flourishing jabot, and he did strut about. He was all excitement and did not stop peeking through the window, and crowing:

—"This is the livery of Madame the Duchess de Montmorency. And here, the courier of the Duke de Lauzun. The Prince de Guéménée has just arrived! Monsieur de Lambesc came in next! Have you seen? Do you know? How good the Queen is! The Queen is so kind!"

He passed and repassed all bewildered, looking for Grétry, and bumped into him in the corridor, just in front of me.

—"Tell me, Monsieur Grétry, my dear Monsieur Grétry, tell me, I beg of you, is it not possible for me to say a word to this famous singer you are bringing here? Surely an ignoramus, an illiterate like me is not permitted to raise the slightest doubt of her talent. But I would like you to tell me again that there is no danger of the Queen being displeased. There has been no rehearsal!"

—"Well now!" answered Grétry with an air of mockery, "it is impossible for me to answer you that, my dear sir. What I can assure you is that you shall not see her. An actress like she, sir, is a spoiled child. But you will see her

when she comes on. Moreover, if it were another than Mademoiselle Colombe, what would it be to you?"

—"What, sir, to me, the manager of the Orleans Theatre? I should have no right . . ." and he puffed out his cheeks.

—"No right whatever, my dear manager," said Grétry. "Why, how can you doubt for a minute a talent Sedaine and I have vouched for?" he pursued more seriously.

I was very glad to hear that name quoted with authority, and I paid closer attention.

The manager, like a man that knows his business, wanted to take advantage of the circumstance. He snorted:

—"But don't I count for something? What do you take me for? I have loaned my theatre with great pleasure; I was only too glad to see the illustrious princess who . . ."

Grétry cut him short. "By the way, you know I am charged to tell you that the Queen shall let you have a sum equal to one-half of the gross receipts this evening?"

The manager made a profound bow, slipping backward the while, which proved the joy this piece of news gave him.

—"Fie, sir, fie! I am not talking about

that, in spite of the respect with which I shall accept this bounty. But you have not let me hope for anything to come from your genius, and . . ."

—"You know too that there is some question of you to manage the Comédie-Italienne at Paris?"

—"Ah! Monsieur Grétry!"

—"At court they talk only of your merits. Everybody there likes you, and it is because of it, that the Queen wanted to see your theatre. A manager is the soul of everything. From him emanate the genius of the authors, of the composers, of the actors, the decorators, the scene-painters, the lighters and the sweepers. He is the beginning and end of everything. The Queen knows it! You have tripled your prices of admission, I hope?"

—"Oh, better than that, Monsieur Grétry, admission is one louis. I could not be found lacking in respect to the Court by making it any lower."

At this point a great clatter of horses and loud cries of gladness resounded everywhere, and the Queen entered so quickly that I barely had time to present arms, as did the sentry

ahead of me. Two fine and perfumed gentlemen followed her, and a young lady. I recognised her for the one that accompanied the Queen at Montreuil.

The performance began at once. Le Kain and five other actors from the Comédie Française had come to play the tragedy of "Irene." I knew all the time when the tragedy was going on, because the Queen talked and laughed all the while it lasted. People did not applaud, out of respect for her. I think that is still the custom at Court. But when the comic opera came on, she did not talk any more, and no one in her box breathed.

Suddenly I heard the splendid voice of a woman rise on the stage. It moved me to the soul. I trembled so, I had to lean on my musket. There was only one voice like that in the world, a voice that came from the heart, and resounded in the breast like a harp, a voice of passion.

I listened, putting my ear against the door and through the lace curtain before the little peephole of the box, I caught glimpses of the actors and the piece they were playing. One little person was singing:

Il était un oiseau gris
Comme un souris,
Qui, pour loger ses petits,
Fit un p'tit nid.

And said to her lover:

Aimez-moi, Aimez-moi, mon p'tit roi.

And, as he was sitting on the window, she was afraid that her sleeping father might wake and see Colas. So she changed the refrain of her song, and said:

Ah! r'montez vos jambes, car on les voit.

I felt an extraordinary shiver all through my body when I saw how much this Rose resembled Pierrette. It was her figure, her same dress, her red and blue smock, her white petticoat, her little, deliberate and naïve air, her shapely leg and her little shoes with the silver buckles and the red and blue stockings.

—*"Mon Dieu,"* I said to myself, "how clever these actresses have to be to take off the looks of some one else so completely. Here is famous Mademoiselle Colombe, who lives in a fine house, who has come in a carriage, who has

several lackeys and goes about in Paris dressed like a Duchess, and she looks for all the world exactly like Pierrette. But just the same, it is plain it is not she. My poor Pierrette did not sing as well, though her voice was every bit as fine."

Nevertheless, I could not stop looking through the glass and I stuck there till the door was pushed suddenly into my face. It was too warm for the Queen, and she wanted the door of her box opened. I heard her voice. She spoke fast and loud.

—"I am very glad. The King will be much amused at our adventure. Monsieur the First Gentleman of the Chamber may tell Mademoiselle Colombe that she won't regret having let me do the honours in her name. Oh, how amusing this is!"

—"My dear Princess," she said to Madame de Lamballe, "we have hoodwinked everybody here. . . . Every one is doing a good deed without guessing it. There are the good townsfolk of Orleans, delighted with the great singer, and all the Court wanting to applaud her. Yes, yes, let us applaud."

At the same time she gave the signal for applause, and the whole audience, hands now

loosed, no longer let a line of Rose pass without applauding madly. The charming Queen was delighted.

—"There are three thousand lovers here," she said to Monsieur de Biron. "But this time they are lovers of Rose, and not of me."

The play came to an end and the women began to throw their flowers at Rose.

—"And the real lover, where is he?" said the Queen to the Duke de Lauzun. He left the box and motioned to my captain who was roaming along the corridor.

The fit of trembling took me again. I felt that something was going to happen to me. Yet I dared not look forward to or comprehend, or even think of what it might be.

My captain bowed deeply and spoke softly to Monsieur de Lauzun. The Queen looked at me. I had to lean against the wall to keep from falling. People came up the stairs and I saw Michel Sedaine, followed by Grétry, and the manager, important and silly. They escorted Pierrette, the real Pierrette, my own Pierrette, my little sister, my wife, my Pierrette of Montreuil.

The manager cried from afar:

—"This has been a splendid evening, eighteen thousand francs!"

The Queen turned around, and walking outside her box in a way that was at once full of frank gaiety and shrewd benevolence, she took Pierrette's hand:

—"Come, dear child, there is no other work by which you could honestly earn your dower in one hour's time. To-morrow I am going to take my little pupil to Monsieur le Curé of Montreuil, who will absolve us both, I hope. He will surely forgive you for having play-acted once in your life. It's the least an honest woman may do."

Then she saluted me. Saluted me! I, who was more than half dead! Such cruelty!

—"I hope," she said, "that Monsieur Mathurin will accept Pierrette's fortune now. I won't add a penny to it. She has earned it all herself."

CHAPTER XI

CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF THE ADJUTANT

HERE our Adjutant rose to take the portrait which he let us pass from hand to hand once again.

"Here she is," he said, "in the same costume, the same headdress and the same kerchief at her throat. Here she is just as Madame the Princess de Lamballe wanted to paint her. It is your mother, my child," he said to the pretty young person he had close by him on his knee. "She never play-acted again, for she could never learn but that one part in 'Rose et Colas' the Queen had taught her."

He was moved. His old, white moustache trembled a little, and a tear fell on it.

"Here is a child that caused her mother's death at birth," he added. "I have had to love her a great deal to forgive her for that. But all is not given us at the same time. It would have been too much for me, apparently, for

Providence has not willed it so. Afterwards I rolled along with the cannon of the Republic and the Empire. And I may say that between Marengo and the Moscova I have seen many pretty fights. But in all my life I have had no more wonderful day than the one of which I have just been telling you. The day I entered the Royal Guard, too, was one of the best. I again took to the white cockade I had had in the Royal-Auvergne with great joy! And also, Lieutenant, I have stuck to doing my duty, as you have seen. I believe I would die of shame, if at inspection to-morrow a single cannon-cartridge should be missing. At that, I think they took a keg of powder at the last firing exercises for cartridges for the infantry. I would almost like to go and see, if it were not forbidden to enter with lights."

We begged him to rest easy and stay with his children; they turned him from his intent. And while finishing his little glass, he told us a few more indifferent features of his life. He had had no advancement because he had always loved the picked corps and had become too much attached to his regiment. A gunner in the Guards of the Consuls, a sergeant in the Imperial Guard had always seemed higher

ranks to him than officer of the line. I have seen many veterans like that. Furthermore, all a soldier can have in the way of dignities, he had; the musket "of honour," with silver rings, the cross of honour with pension, and particularly fine and noble service records in which the "brilliant action" columns were filled up. Of those he did not tell.

It was two o'clock in the morning. We put an end to the vigil, and cordially pressing the hand of this good man we rose and left him happy with the emotions of his life he had revived within his fine and honest soul.

"How many times more worthy," I said, "is this old soldier in his resignation than we, young officers, with our mad ambitions! Here is something for us to think about."

"Yes," I continued, crossing the little bridge that was drawn up after us, "I believe that. I believe the finest thing, of our times, is the spirit of such a soldier, scrupulous of his honour, and thinking it stained by the slightest mark of lack of discipline, or of neglect. Without self-seeking, without vanity, without luxury! A slave always, but always proud and content of his servitude, with nothing cherished in his life save a memory of gratitude."

"And believing Providence has an eye on him!" said Timoleon, with an air profoundly touched. And he left me to go to his own quarters.

CHAPTER XII

THE AWAKENING

I SLEPT for an hour. It was four in the morning. It was August seventeenth, I have not forgotten. Suddenly my two windows burst open together, and all their shattered panes fell into my room with a little silvery tinkle, very pretty to hear. I opened my eyes, and I saw a whitish smoke come softly into my room and up to my bed, making a thousand wreaths. I began to contemplate them with rather surprised eyes, and I recognised them by their colour as quickly as by their smell.

I ran to the window. Day was just breaking. Its tender sheen lighted all the old motionless castle that was still silent. It seemed to be in the stupor of the first blow it had just received. Nothing stirred. The old grenadier only, that was posted on the rampart where he was bolted in as usual, marched very fast, rifle at shoulder, looking towards the courts. He went like a caged lion.

As all remained silent, I began to believe that a rifle trial in the pits had caused the commotion, when a violent explosion was heard. At the same instant I saw a sun rise that was not the sun of Heaven. It rose on the last tower towards the woods. Its rays were red. Each one of them had at its end a bomb that was bursting. In front of them a mist of powder. This time the donjon, the barracks, the towers, the ramparts, the village and the woods shuddered and seemed to slide from left to right and back like a drawer opened and immediately shut. Then I understood the quaking of the ground. A rattling similar to that of all the porcelain of Sèvres thrown out of a window made me grasp perfectly that of all the windows of the chapel, of all the panes in the castle, of all the lights of the barracks and the village, not a sliver remained sticking to the putty. The whitish smoke curled away in little wreaths!

"The powder is very excellent when it makes little wreaths like those," said Timoleon, entering my room all dressed and armed.

"It seems to me we are blowing up," I answered.

"I say nothing to the contrary," he muttered coldly. "There is nothing to be done as yet."

In three minutes I was dressed and armed like him. In silence we stared at the silent castle.

Suddenly twenty drummers sounded the alarm. The walls came out of their stupor and their impassivity and echoing called for help. The arms of the drawbridge began to lower slowly and dropped their heavy chains on the opposite side of the moat. That was to let the officers come in and the inhabitants get out. We ran to the portcullis: it opened to admit the strong and throw out the weak.

A singular spectacle struck us. All the women crowded around the door, and at the same time all the horses of the garrison. By some just instinct of danger they had broken their stable halters or thrown their riders, and pawing, waited for an outlet to the open. They ran through the courts, mane bristling, nostrils wide, red-eyed and rearing against the walls, sniffing the powder and hiding their scorched muzzles in the sand.

A young and pretty person, wrapped in her bedclothes, followed by her half-dressed mother who was carried by a soldier, went out first.

All the crowd followed. At the moment, that seemed a very useless precaution to me, for the open ground was not safe for six miles from the place.

We entered on the run, with all the officers quartered in the village. The first thing that struck me was the serene faces of our old Grenadiers of the Guard, stationed at the entrance. Rifles at rest, calmly leaning on them, they looked towards the powder-house knowingly, but without a word and without quitting the prescribed attitude, hand on rifle strap.

My friend, Ernest d'Hanache, commanded them. He saluted us with the Henri IV smile that came natural to him. I shook hands with him. He did not lose his life until in the last Vendéen uprising, where he died nobly. All those I mention in these still recent reminiscences are already dead.

In running I stumbled over something that all but made me fall. It was a human foot. I could not help stopping to look at it.

"That's what your foot will be like in a moment," said an officer going by and laughing heartily.

There was nothing to indicate that foot had ever been shod. It seemed as if embalmed, and

preserved like a mummy's. Torn off about two inches above the ankle, like the feet of statues that serve for models in studios—polished, veined like black marble, without any pink except the nails. I had no time to sketch it. I went my way to the farthest court, in front of the barracks.

There we awaited our soldiers. In their first surprise they had thought the castle was attacked. They had jumped from their beds to the rifleracks and gathered in the court, most of them in their nightshirts, but rifle in hand. Nearly all had their feet bleeding and cut with broken glass. They stood dumb and motionless against an enemy that was not man, and were glad to see their officers arrive.

As for us, it was the very crater of the volcano into which we ran. It still smoked and a third eruption was imminent.

The small powder-house tower was ripped asunder and through its open flanks lazy smoke was seen to rise and curl upward.

Had all the powder in the little tower exploded? Or did enough remain to blow us all up? That was the question! But there was another that was not so uncertain; it was that all the artillery caissons, loaded and open,

in the adjoining court, would blow up if a single spark reached them; and that the donjon holding four hundred thousand rounds of cannon powder, Vincennes, its woods, its town, its fields and part of the Faubourg Saint-Antoine would be sent flying sky-high with all the bricks, branches, earth, roofs, and the best attached human heads as well.

The best aid to discipline is danger. When everybody is exposed, everybody keeps silent and clings to the first man who gives a command or a salutary example.

The first to throw himself upon the caissons was Timoleon. The serious, self-contained expression did not leave his face. But with surprising agility he jumped for a wheel about to flame up. Lacking water, he extinguished it with his coat, his hands and his breast which he leaned against it. At first we thought he was lost. But coming to his aid we found the wheel blackened and out, his coat burned, and his left hand a little dusted with black. For the rest he was entirely intact and calm.

In an instant all the caissons were torn out of the dangerous court and run outside the fortress in the plain of the polygon. Each gunner, each soldier, each officer harnessed himself,

tugged, rolled, pushed the redoubtable wagons with hands and feet, shoulders and foreheads.

The pumps flooded the little powder house through the black gash in its breast. It was split on all sides. Twice it leaned forward and backward. Then its flanks curled open like the bark of a big tree, and toppling over, it showed up a sort of oven, blackened and smoking, in which nothing had any recognisable form. Every weapon, every shell in it had been reduced to a reddish-grey powder, diluted in frothing water; a kind of lava in which blood, iron, lead, had mixed into living mortar that flowed out into the courts, burning the grass where it ran.

The danger was over. Remained to reconnoitre and to count noses.

"That must have been heard in Paris," said Timoleon, wringing my hand. "I am going to write her, to reassure her. There is nothing left to be done here."

He did not speak another word to anybody and returned to our tiny white house with the green blinds, as if he had come back from a hunt.

CHAPTER XIII

A SKETCH IN PENCIL

WHEN dangers are past, they are measured and found great. People are amazed at their luck; they pale with the fear they might have felt. They applaud not having been overcome by any weakness, and they feel, upon reflection and calculation, a kind of fright they did not think of in action.

Powder does extraordinary things, just as does lightning.

This explosion had worked miracles not of power, but of dexterity. It seemed to have measured its blows and picked its aim. It had played with us. It had been telling us: I will blow up this one, but not those there, near-by. It had torn from the earth an arcade of hewn stone, and had sent it whole, with its foundation, on to the lawn in the fields, to lie there like a ruin blackened by age. It had sunk three shells six feet under ground, pulverised

pavements with cannon balls, broken a bronze cannon in two, smashed all the windows and all the doors in all the rooms, blown the huge shutters of the big powder house to the roof without a grain of the powder in it. It had rolled ten great stone street posts around like the pawns of a topsy-turvy chessboard. It had burst the iron chains that hung between them the way silk threads are broken, twisting the links like hemp rope. It had littered the court with broken gunlimbers, and encrusted the brickwork with pyramids of cannon balls. But, under the cannon closest to the destroyed powder house, it had spared the white hen and her chicks we had been looking at the evening before. When that hen stepped peacefully from her nest with her little ones, the shouts of joy from our men acclaimed her as an old friend and they ran to pet her like heedless children.

She turned about clucking, gathering her brood and still wearing her little red plume and her silver necklace. She seemed to be waiting for the master that brought her food, and ran excitedly around our feet, with the little chicks all about her. By following her we came upon a dreadful sight.

At the foot of the chapel lay the head and

chest of the poor Adjutant, without trunk or arms. The foot I had stumbled over in coming had been his. The unfortunate fellow, no doubt, had not been able to resist the desire to visit his powder kegs and count his shells once more. And either the steel on his boots or a rolling pebble—something, some motion—had set everything aflame.

Like a stone from a slingshot his head and chest had been hurled against the church wall to a height of sixty feet, and the powder with which this frightful bust had been impregnated had graved its form in lasting outline upon the wall to the base of which it had rebounded. We gazed long at it. No one spoke a word of commiseration. Perhaps because to pity him would have been to take pity on ourselves for having run the same risk. The surgeon-major, alone, said: "He has not suffered!"

As to myself, it seemed to me he was suffering still. But in spite of that, half through unconquerable curiosity, half through a young officer's bravado, I sketched him.

Things happen this way in a community from which sensitiveness is done away with. One of the bad sides of the fighting trade is this excessive strength to which we always try

to strain our character. We exert ourselves to harden our hearts, to hide pity, lest it resemble weakness. We make an effort to dissemble the divine emotion of compassion, without thinking that forcibly locking up a good sentiment is to stifle the prisoner.

At the moment I thought myself very hateful. My young heart swelled with grief at this death, and yet with obstinate tranquillity I kept at the drawing which I still have, and which now and again causes me remorse for having made it as it sometimes reminds me of the modest life of this fine soldier.

The noble head was only a thing of horror, a sort of Medusa head. Its colour was like black marble. The hair bristling, the eyebrows lifted high on the forehead, the eyes closed, the mouth gaping as if uttering a scream. Sculptured on the black bust was the terror of flames that suddenly leaped from the earth. One felt that he had had time for this terror quick as the powder itself, and perhaps time for incalculable suffering.

"Has he had time to think of Providence?" droned the peaceable voice of Timoleon d'Arc. . . . Over my shoulder he had been peering at my sketch through an eyeglass.

At the same moment a gay trooper, fresh, pink and blond, bent down to take the black silk cravat from this smoke-blackened torso.

"It is still quite good," he said.

He was a decent boy of my own company, Muguet by name, who had two chevrons on his sleeve, no scruples and no gloomy notion whatever. *Furthermore, he was the best son in the world!* That broke our train of thought.

A big noise of horses finally came to distract us. It was the King! Louis XVIII came in a coach to thank his Guard for having saved him his old soldiers and his old castle. For a long time he stood taking in the strange imprint upon the wall. All the troops were in battle order. He raised his strong, clear voice to ask the battalion commander which officers or soldiers had distinguished themselves.

"Everybody has done his duty, Sire!" answered Monsieur de Fontanges simply. He was the most chivalrous and lovable officer I have known; a man of the world, who gave me the best idea what might be the manner of the Duke de Lauzun or the Chevalier de Grammont. Upon which the King pulled from his coach, instead of crosses of honour, piles of gold which he had distributed among the soldiers,

and, crossing Vincennes, he went back through the woods.

The ranks were broken, the explosion was forgotten. No one thought of being dissatisfied, nor of having deserved more than another. In fact, we had been a crew saving our ship to save ourselves, that was all. Nevertheless, I have since seen lesser valour better accounted for.

I thought of the family of the poor Adjutant. But I thought alone. Generally, when Kings pass somewhere, they pass too swiftly.

BOOK IV

THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CAPTAIN RENAUD OR THE MALACCA CANE

BOOK IV: THE LIFE AND DEATH OF CAPTAIN RENAUD, OR THE MALACCA CANE

CHAPTER I

RETROSPECT

How often did we see obscure accidents thus end modest lives which would have been sustained and nurtured by the collective glory of the Empire! Our Army had garnered the invalids of the *Grande Armée,* and they died in our arms, leaving us the memory of their primitive, singular characters. These men seemed to us like the remnants of a giant race which, man by man, was fast becoming extinct. We loved what was good and honest in their customs. But our more studious generation could not help noticing sometimes in them little childish and old-fashioned traits that the idleness of peace caused to crop out before our eyes. To us the Army seemed a body without motion.

We suffocated in the belly of this wooden horse which never opened in any Troy. You remember it, you, my comrades; we never stopped studying the Commentaries of Cæsar, Turenne and Frederick II and we were forever reading the lives of those Generals of the Republic that were so utterly infatuated with glory, those candid and poverty-stricken heroes like Marceau, Desaix and Kléber, young men of antique virtues! And having studied their war monœuvres and their campaigns, we were plunged into bitter grief at measuring our fate by theirs, and figuring that their rise had become so great because they had started (and that at twenty) at the top of that ladder of ranks each rung of which cost us eight years to ascend. You whom I have seen suffer so much from the languors and aversions of military servitude, it is for you particularly that I write this book. And therefore, beside the reminiscences in which I have shown some of the good and honest traits in Army life, but in which I have also sketched some of the little hardships of that existence, I want to place the memories that may lift up our heads by the research and the contemplation of its magnificence.

Warlike magnificence, or the beauty of life at arms, is of two kinds, I think: the one of commanding, the other of obeying. The one, all outward, active, dazzling, proud, selfish and capricious, will grow rarer and less desired day by day, in the same measure that civilisation is growing more peaceable. The other, all inward, passive, obscure, modest, devoted and persevering, will become more honoured each day. For to-day, when the spirit of conquest is waning, all of greatness a lofty mind may bring to the profession of Arms seems less the glory of fighting than the honour of suffering in silence and of fulfilling with constancy tasks that are often odious.

If the month of July, 1830, had its heroes, it also had its martyrs among you, my brave comrades! At present you are all separated and scattered. Many among you are retired in silence after the storm beneath your family roof. However poor it was at times, many have preferred it to the shadow of a flag other than their own. Others have gone to seek their *fleurs-de-lys* in the heather of Vendée and once more have drenched it with their blood. Others have gone to die for foreign kings. And some, still bleeding from the wounds of the

"Three Days," have not resisted the temptations of the sword; they have taken it up again for France and have gained still more strongholds for her. Everywhere the same habit of giving themselves body and soul, the same need of self-devotion, the same desire to carry on and to practice, somewhere, the art of suffering well, of dying well!

But everywhere complaints have risen from those that did not have a chance to fight where their lot was cast. Fight is the life of the Army. Wherever it starts, dreams become reality, science becomes glory and servitude becomes service. War consoles, by its refulgence, for the unheard-of hardships the lethargy of peace imposes upon the slaves of the Army. But, I reiterate, it is not in battle that the purest magnificence lies. I shall speak often of you to others. But for once, before closing this book, I want to tell you about yourselves, and of a life and death which, to my eyes, showed a splendidly forceful and candid character.

CHAPTER II

A MEMORABLE NIGHT

THE night of July 27th, 1830, was silent and solemn. To me its memory is fresher than that of more frightful pictures fate has flung before my eyes.

The quiet on land and sea before the tempest has no greater majesty than had Paris before the Revolution. The boulevards were deserted. Alone, after midnight, I walked their entire length, looking and listening avidly. The clear sky shed over the earth the white gleam of her stars, but the houses were lightless, shut and like dead. All the street lamps were broken. Some groups of workmen still clustered about trees, listening to a mysterious orator who slipped them secret words in a low voice. Then they would separate on the run and slink into narrow, black little streets. They would remain glued against alley doors, that would open like a trap and close after them. Then

nothing more stirred and the city seemed to have none but dead inhabitants and pest-blighted dwellings.

At intervals I would encounter a dark, motionless mass, unrecognisable until I almost ran into it: it was a battalion of the Guard, upright, motionless, voiceless. Farther on, an artillery battery, with the fuses ready lighted over the guns, like twin stars.

One passed with impunity in front of these sombre and imposing corps. One walked around them, one left them, one returned, without provoking a question, an oath, a word. They were inoffensive, ruthless and ungrudging.

As I approached one of the largest squads, an officer came forward and in an extremely courteous manner asked me if the flames that could be seen lighting up the Port of St. Denis from afar, were not incendiary. He was about to go forward with his troop to make sure. I told him the flames came from some big trees cut down and burned by tradesmen who took advantage of the trouble to destroy those ancient elms that had hidden their shops.

Then, sitting down on one of the stone benches along the boulevard, he started to draw

lines and circles in the sand with a malacca cane. I recognised him by this, and at the same time he recognised my face. As I remained standing before him, he shook hands with me, and begged me to sit down beside him.

Captain Renaud was a rigid and severe man of most cultivated mind, like many who were in the Guards at that period. His character and habits were very well known to us, and those who read these reminiscences, well know on which serious face they must place his *nom de guerre,* given him by the soldiers, adopted by the officers and indifferently accepted by the man himself. Like the old families, the old regiments keep intact during peace, take on familiar habits and invent characteristic names for their children.

An old wound in the right leg had caused the captain's habit of leaning always on his malacca cane, which had a very remarkable head, that attracted the attention of all that saw it for the first time. He kept it by him everywhere, in his hand most of the time. There was not the slightest affectation in this habit. His manner was too simple and grave. Nevertheless, one felt he had an affection for it.

He was greatly honoured in the Guard. Without ambition and wishing to be no other than he was, a Grenadier Captain, he was forever reading, spoke as little as possible and then in monosyllables. Very tall, very pale, melancholy of face, on his forehead between the eyebrows there was a little scar; quite a deep one. Often it used to change from bluish to black in colour, and sometimes gave a ferocious look to his habitually cold and peaceable features.

The soldiers had a great liking for him, and particularly during the Spanish campaign one remarked the joy with which they went out when the detachments were commanded by the Malacca Cane. It actually was the malacca cane that commanded them. For Captain Renaud never drew his sword, not even when, at the head of his skirmishers, he would get close enough to the enemy to run the risk of hand-to-hand combat.

He was not only a man experienced in warfare, but one who had besides so keen a knowledge of the biggest political affairs in Europe during the Empire that people did not know how to account for it. Sometimes it would be attributed to profound studies, and again to high relations of long standing; his perpetual

reserve prevented people from knowing how he came by it. Besides, the dominating character of the men of to-day is this same reserve —and the Captain carried this general trait to an extreme. At present an appearance of cold politeness covers both character and actions. Therefore, I believe that few of us will recognise ourselves beneath the mad portraits that have been drawn of us. In France affectation is more ridiculous than anywhere else, and it is doubtless for that reason that, far from exhibiting by one's actions and speech the access force which passions give us, each one seeks to quell within himself any display of violent emotion, a deep sorrow, or an involuntary outburst. I do not think that civilisation has stirred up everything; I seem rather to see that it has enveloped all.

I like this reserve of our epoch. There is a modesty in this apparent coldness, and genuine sentiment has need of that. Disdain also enters into it—good coin that, with which to pay the things of life.

We have already lost many friends whose memory still lives among us; you remember them well, my dear brothers in arms. Some died in wars, others from duels, others by sui-

cide; all of them men of honour and strong character; but headstrong beneath their simple, cold and reserved appearance. Ambition, love, gaming, hatred, jealousy—all gnawed within them, but they never talked much, or when they did, skilfully turned any direct enquiry that might touch the bleeding wound in their hearts. They never sought to make themselves remarked in drawing-rooms by their tragic attitudes; and if some young woman fresh from the perusal of a novel had seen them submissive and disciplined to the customary bows and low-voiced conversations so prevalent, she certainly would have disdained them; and yet they lived and died, as strong men as nature ever produced. Cato and Brutus were none other in spite of the togas that adorned them.

Our passions are as energetic as those of any period, but it is only by the sign of their fatigue that a friendly eye can discern them. The exterior appearance, the conversations, the manners, all have a certain cold dignity which is common to all and which is cast aside but by few children who wish to grow and make themselves known in spite of all.

There is no profession wherein the coldness of the forms of speech and habits contrasts

more vividly with the activity of the life, than in the army. The hatred for exaggeration is a cult, and disgust is shown for any man who seeks to magnify a feeling, or to court sympathy for his suffering. I knew this, and made ready to leave Captain Renaud quickly, when he took my arm and held me back:

"Did you see the drill of the Suisses[1] this morning? It was very curious. They executed hollow square fire while advancing, with perfect accuracy. Since I have been in the service I have never seen it done. It is a drill for the parade or for the opera. But in the streets of a big city it may be worth while, provided the right and left sections quickly form in front of the platoon that has just fired."

He continued tracing lines on the ground with the tip of his cane while talking. Then he got up slowly, and as he walked along the boulevard with the intention of going away from the group of officers and soldiers, I followed him. He went on talking to me, as if voluntarily, with a sort of nervous exaltation, which captivated me, and I never would have

[1] "Suisses," the Swiss mercenaries, guards of the Bourbon Kings.

thought it of one who would be commonly called a cold man.

Taking hold of the button of my coat, he began with a very simple request.

"Would you pardon me for asking you to send me your gorget of the Royal Guard, if you have kept it? I have left mine at home and I can't send for it, nor go for it myself, because the people kill us in the streets like mad dogs. But in the three or four years since you have left the Army, you have done away with it perhaps? I too had tendered my resignation two weeks ago, for I am very weary of the Army. But day before yesterday, when I read the orders, I said: They are taking up arms! So I bundled up my uniform, my shoulder straps and my bearskin grenadier's cap, and went into the barracks to rejoin those fine fellows who are going to be killed on every corner, and that surely would have thought, at the bottom of their hearts, that I left them in the lurch in a moment of crisis. It would have been against Honour, would it not, entirely against Honour?"

"Had you foreseen the orders before your resignation?" I answered.

"My Lord, no! I have not even read them yet."

"Well then, why do you reproach yourself?"

"Only because of appearances. I don't want appearances even to be against me."

"That is admirable," I said.

"Admirable! Admirable!" Captain Renaud walked faster. Spoke faster too. "That is the phrase to-day. What a childish phrase! I detest admiration. It is the cause of too many bad actions. It is given too cheaply these days, and to everybody. We had better beware of admiring too lightly."

There was a pause. Then:

"Admiration is corrupted and corrupting. People should do for the doing, not for the noise it makes. Moreover I have some ideas of my own on this." He broke off bruskly and was about to leave me.

"There is something quite as fine as a great man," I said to him, "and that is a man of Honour."

He took my hand affectionately. "We share that opinion. I have put it in practice all my life. But it has cost me dearly. It is not as easy as it looks!" He spoke nervously.

The sub-lieutenant of his company came up to ask him for a cigar. He pulled several from his pocket and gave them to him without speak-

ing. The officers began to smoke, tramping back and forth in a silence and serenity the memory of the attending circumstances failed to break. For no one deigned to talk of the dangers of the day, nor of his duty, thoroughly realising both the one and the other.

Captain Renaud came back to me. "Fine weather," he said to me, pointing his malacca cane at the sky. "I don't know when I'll stop seeing the same stars every night. Once I happened to imagine that I might see those of the South Sea. But I was destined not to change hemispheres. No matter! It is superb weather. The Parisians are asleep or make believe they are. None of us has eaten nor drunk for twenty-four hours. That makes the thoughts very clear. I remember a day, going into Spain, when you asked why I had advanced so little. I had no time to tell you then. But to-night I feel tempted to come back to my life that I have been going over again in memory. You like stories, I remember. And in your retired life you will like to remember us. If you care to sit down on this parapet of the boulevard with me, we will be able to talk very quietly, for it seems to me the people have stopped taking pot-shots at us from windows and cellar vents.

"I shall tell you only about a few periods of my life and I shall follow only my whim. I have seen much and read much, but I do not believe I should be able to write. It is not my trade, thank God! and I have never tried it. But I know how to live and I have lived the way I had resolved to (from the moment I had the courage to resolve), and that, truly, is something. Let us sit down!"

Slowly I followed. We went through the battalion to pass to the left of these fine grenadiers. They stood upright, gravely, chins on the rifle muzzles. A few youngsters, more fatigued by the day than the others, had sat down on their knapsacks. They were all silent, and coolly busy with repairing their gear or making it more correct. Nothing indicated worry or discontent. They were in their ranks, as after a day of review, and awaited orders.

When we were seated, our old friend began and in his own fashion told me of three great epochs that gave me an understanding of his life, and explained his bizarre habits and the sombreness in his character.

Nothing he has told me has been wiped from my memory. I will repeat it almost word for word.

CHAPTER III

MALTA

I DO not count, he said first. At present, it is a pleasure for me to think so. But if I were somebody, I might say like Louis XIV: I loved war too well.

What are you going to do? Bonaparte had gone to my head so violently that there was no room in my brain for another thought. My father, an elderly superior officer, always in camp, was quite unknown to me. Then one day he had the fancy to take me to Egypt with him. I was twelve years old, and have remembered, since that day as if it were to-day, the sentiments of the whole Army and those that took hold of my own mind. Two spirits swelled the sails of our bark; the spirit of glory and the spirit of piracy. My father heeded the latter no more than the northwester that blew us along, but the former buzzed in my ears so strongly that it made me deaf to the noises

of the world for a long time, except to the music of Charles XII, the cannon.

The cannon, to me, was the voice of Bonaparte. And child as I was, when it roared I would grow red with joy. I would jump for pleasure, clap my hands at it and respond to it with loud yells. These first emotions prepared the exaggerated enthusiasm that became the purpose and the folly of my life. One memorable encounter decided this sort of fatal admiration, this mad admiration for which I wanted to sacrifice too much.

The fleet weighed anchor on the thirtieth of *Floréal* in the year VI. The first day and night I spent on the bridge to bathe in the happiness of seeing the blue ocean and all our ships. I counted one hundred hulls and I could not count all of them. Our military line was a mile long, and the half circle the convoy formed was at least six miles.

I said nothing. I saw Corsica pass by very close, trailing Sardinia in its wake, and presently Sicily arrived to our left. The *Juno,* which carried my father and me, was to reconnoitre the way and form a vanguard with three other frigates.

My father held my hand, and showed me

Mount Ætna all in smoke, and other rocks I will never forget. They were Favaniane and Mount Eryx. Marsala, the ancient Lilybæum, passed in its vapours. Its white houses I took for doves piercing a cloud. And one morning, it was . . . yes, it was the twenty-fourth of *Prairial,* I saw at daybreak come before me a spectacle which has dazzled me for twenty years.

Malta rose up with its fortresses, its cannon level with the water, its long walls shining in the sun like newly polished marble, and its swarm of narrow galleys were run with long red oars. One hundred and ninety-four French ships enveloped it with their huge sails and blue, red and white standards, which at that moment were hoisted on every mast. And on the *Gozo* and Fort Saint-Elme the religious standard were slowly lowered: It was the last militant cross to fall. Then the fleet fired five hundred salutes.

The ship *Orient* was ahead, alone, apart, grand and motionless. Before it passed the other war vessels one by one, and slowly. From a distance I saw Desaix saluting Bonaparte. We went to him on board the *Orient.* At last I saw him, for the first time.

He stood near the rail, talking to Casa-Bianca, captain of the ship (poor *Orient*). He played with the locks of a child of ten, the captain's son.

Instantly I became jealous of that child and my heart jumped to see it touch the general's sword. My father went towards Bonaparte and talked to him a long time. I could not see his face yet.

Suddenly he turned and looked at me. A quiver went through all my body at the sight of his sallow brow overhung with long hair that seemed all wet, as if coming out of the water; at his big grey eyes, his thin cheeks and that receding lip above his sharp chin.

He had just been talking of me, for he said:

—"Listen, *mon brave,* you shall come to Egypt since you want to, and General Vaubois can stay here with his four thousand men without you. But I don't like men to take along their children. I have permitted it only to Casa-Bianca and I was wrong. You must send this one back to France. I want him to be strong in mathematics. And if anything happens to you out there, I will answer for him myself. I take charge of him. I shall make a good soldier out of him."

At the same moment he stooped down and, taking me up under the arms, he lifted me as high as his lips and kissed my forehead. My head was turned then and there. I knew he was my master and that he took my soul away from my father—whom I scarcely knew for that matter, because he lived with the Army eternally.

I thought I felt the awe of Moses, the shepherd, beholding God in the burning bush. Bonaparte had lifted me, free, and when his arms gently lowered me on the bridge, they put down another slave.

The day before I would have jumped overboard if they had taken me away from the Army. But now I let myself be taken whereever they pleased. I left my father indifferently. And it was forever! But we are so bred right from childhood, and it takes so little to lead us away from our good natural sentiments. My father was no longer my master, because I had beheld his own, and from him alone emanated all authority on earth, it seemed to me!

Oh dreams of authority and of bondage! Oh corrupting thought of power, serving to seduce children! False enthusiasms! Subtile

poisons, what antidote can ever be found against you?

I was dazzled, drunk! I wanted to work, and I worked unto madness! I figured day and night, and I took on the coat, the knowledge and the sallow complexion of the school.

Now and then the cannon would interrupt me, and this voice of the demi-god told me of the conquest of Egypt, of Marengo, of the 18th of *Brumaire,* the Empire . . . and the Emperor kept his word to me! As to my father, I no longer knew what had become of him, until one day this letter here reached me.

I always carry it in this old portfolio, that once was red. I reread it often to convince myself thoroughly of the uselessness of the advice one generation gives to the next, and to reflect upon the headstrong absurdity of my illusions.

The Captain here opened his uniform and drew from his breast first a handkerchief and then a small portfolio which he opened with care. We went into a still lighted café where he read to me these fragments of letters which since then have never left me.

You will soon know why.

CHAPTER IV

A SIMPLE LETTER

On board the British Vessel *Culloden* before Rochefort, 1804.

Sent to France with Admiral Collingwood's permission.

It is useless for you to know, my boy, how this letter will reach you, and by what means I have been able to learn of your conduct and of your present position. Suffice it to say that I am satisfied with you, but that no doubt I shall never see you again. Probably that won't trouble you much. You knew your father only at the age when memory was not yet born and when the heart was not yet awake. It opens later within us than people generally believe, and I have often wondered about that. But what can we do about it?—You are no worse than any other, it seems to me. So I have to be satisfied.

All I have to tell you is that I have been a

prisoner of the British since *Thermidor* 14th of the year VI (or August 2nd, 1798, by the old calendar, which people say has come in vogue again these days). I had gone on board the *Orient* to try and persuade our brave Brueys to weigh anchor for Corfu. Bonaparte had already sent me his poor aide-de-camp, Julien, who was foolish enough to let the Arabs capture him. I arrived, but in vain. Brueys was obstinate as a mule. He said they were going to find the passage of Alexandria for the ships to go through. But he added a few rather proud words which showed me that at heart he was a little jealous of the land Army.

"Do they take us for ferry-men?" he asked me, "and do they believe we are afraid of the British?"

It would have been better for France had he been afraid of them. But, if he has made mistakes, he has expiated them gloriously. And I may say that I am expiating most wearily the error I made in staying on his ship when it was attacked. Brueys was first wounded in the head and in the hand. He kept on fighting till the moment when a cannon ball tore out his entrails. He had himself put in a sack of bran and died on his officers' bench.

We were distinctly aware that by ten in the evening we would blow up. What remained of the crew lowered the boats and saved themselves, with the exception of Casa-Bianca. Naturally he remained the last. But his son, a fine boy whom you have seen, I believe, came up to me and said:

"Citizen, what does Honour require me to do?"

Poor little fellow! I think he was ten years old, and babbled of Honour at such a moment! I took him on my lap into the boat, and prevented him from seeing his father blow up with the poor *Orient,* which scattered into the air like a jet of flame. We did not blow up, but we were captured, which is a great deal worse. I went to Dover under guard of a good English captain called Collingwood, who commands the *Culloden* at present. He is a brave man if ever there was one. Since 1761 when he entered the Navy he had not quit the sea more than two years, to be married and see his two daughters born. His children, of whom he talks constantly, don't know him. Nor does his wife know his splendid character except through his letters.

But I feel that the sorrow over this defeat

at Aboukir has shortened my days (that have been none too long at that) for having seen such a disaster and the death of my glorious comrades. Everybody here has been touched by my great age. And because the English climate makes me cough a great deal and has reopened all my wounds to the point of depriving me entirely of the use of one arm, good Captain Collingwood has requested and obtained—what he could not have obtained for himself to whom the shore is denied—sanction to transfer me to Sicily, where the sun is warmer and the sky clearer.

I believe I shall end there. For, seventy-eight years, seven wounds, deep sorrows, and captivity are incurable ailments. I had only my sword to leave you, my poor boy! At present I no longer possess even that, for a prisoner has no sword.

But at least there is one counsel I may give you. It is to beware of men that rise quickly, and particularly to beware of Bonaparte. As far as I know you, you will be a satellite, and you must avoid satellitism because you are French, which means being most susceptible to this contagious disease. The number of big and little tyrants it has produced is marvellous.

We are fond in the extreme of swaggerers, and we give ourselves to them so whole-heartedly that we are not slow to rue it sadly by and by. The cause of this error is that we have a great need of action and are very lazy at reflection. The consequence is that we much rather give ourselves body and soul to him that undertakes to think and be responsible for us, even should we laugh afterwards at ourselves and at him.

Bonaparte is a *bon enfant,* but he is truly too much of a charlatan. I am afraid he will be the founder among us of a new method of juggling. We have quite enough of that in France. Charlatanism is insolent and corrupting. It has set such great examples in our century and has made so much noise with drums and fife in the public square, that it has crept into every profession, and there is no man so small but he is puffed up with it.

The number of frogs that burst is uncountable. I desire very much that my son shall not be one of them.

I am glad that he has kept his word to me "to take charge of you," as he said he would. But do not trust in him too much. A little time after my sad departure from Egypt, I

was told of this scene which passed at a certain dinner. I will tell it to you so that you may think of it often.

Being at Cairo, on *Vendémiaire* 1st, year VII, Bonaparte, as a member of the Institute, gave orders for a civic festival to be held on the anniversary of the establishment of the Republic. The garrison of Alexandria celebrated the fête around Pompey's columns on which was hoisted the Tricolour flag. Cleopatra's needle was illuminated but rather badly, and the troops of upper Egypt celebrated the fête as best they could between the columns, the caryatides of Thebes, on the knees of the Colossus of Memnon, at the feet of the statues of Tâma and Châma. In Cairo the first army corps manœuvred, held its races, and set off fire-works.

The Commander in Chief had invited to the dinner the entire staff, the sages and the Kiaya of the Pacha, as well as the Emir, the members of the Divan and the Agas. They were gathered around a table with five hundred covers spread in the lower hall of the house Bonaparte occupied on the Place El-Béquier. The liberty cap and the crescent were entwined almost loverlike. The Turkish and French

colours formed a cradle and a most agreeable carpet, on which the Koran and the table of the Rights of Man were happily united.

After the guests had dined well—with their fingers—on chicken and rice seasoned with saffron, pastries and fruit, Bonaparte, who had not spoken, suddenly cast a keen glance upon them all. Kléber, who was lying beside him because he could not fold his long legs Turkish fashion, nudged Abdallah Menou, his neighbour on the other side, with his elbow, and said in his half German accent:

"Look, here's Ali-Bonaparte getting ready to give us one of his speeches!"

He called him that because at the fête of Mohamet the general had amused himself by wearing the Oriental costume, and at the moment when he declared himself the protector of all religion, they had pompously given him the title of "The Prophet's son-in-law" and called him Ali-Bonaparte.

Kléber had not yet finished speaking and was still running his fingers through his heavy white hair when little Bonaparte was already on his feet. And raising his glass to his meagre chin and huge neckcloth, he said in a brusque, clear, jerky voice:

"Let us drink to the year Three Hundred of the French Republic!"

Kléber burst out laughing upon Menou's shoulder nearly making him spill his glass over an old Aga. Bonaparte glared at them sideways, frowning.

Surely, my boy, he was right! For in the presence of a Commander in Chief a Division Commander must not behave indecently, even though the rascal be called Kléber. But they were not altogether wrong either, for at the present moment Bonaparte calls himself Emperor, and you are his page.

Captain Renaud took the letter from my hand, saying:

I had actually just been appointed page to the Emperor in 1804. Ah, what a terrible year that was! What events did it bring! How I would have watched it if I had known enough to watch anything at the time! But I had no eyes to see, no ears to hear other than the deeds of the Emperor, the voice of the Emperor, the gestures of the Emperor, the very footsteps of the Emperor! His approach intoxicated me, his presence magnetised me. The glory of being attached to that man seemed to me the

greatest thing in the world and never did a lover feel the power of his mistress with keener and more overwhelming emotions than those which the sight of Napoleon gave me each day.

The admiration for a Military Chief becomes a passion, a fanaticism, a frenzy, which makes slaves of us, madmen, blind men! This poor letter I just gave you to read only filled in my spirit the place of what schoolboys call a "lecture." I felt nothing but the impious relief of a child that finds deliverance from the natural authority and believes itself free, because it has chosen the chain which the impulse of the moment rivets round its neck.

Outside of that, some native sense of decency made me preserve this sacred writing, and its authority over me has grown in the same measure that my dreams of heroic thraldom dwindled. It has been kept on my heart always and has ended by sending invisible roots into it, the moment good sense had lifted from my eyes the veil that covered them before. To-night I could not help rereading it with you, and I scorn myself to contemplate how slow has been the curve my thoughts have followed before returning to the simplest and most solid basis of a man's conduct.

You shall see to what little it was reduced. But, sir, I truly think such a return suffices a man's life. It has taken me a great deal of time to find the source of the true Greatness that a man may possess in the almost barbarous profession of Arms.

Here Captain Renaud was interrupted by an old sergeant of Grenadiers, who posted himself at the door of the café, carrying his weapon, as do the noncommissioned officers, and pulling out a letter written on grey glazed paper from under the strap of his rifle. The Captain rose quietly and opened the order he received.

"Tell Béjaud to copy this on the order book," he said to the sergeant.

"The sergeant-major has not returned from the Arsenal," said the man, in a voice soft as a girl's, lowering his eyes, and without even deigning to say how his comrade had been killed.

"Let the mess-sergeant take his place," said the Captain without asking a question. And he signed his order on the sergeant's book, using his back for a desk.

He coughed slightly, and resumed quietly.

CHAPTER V

AN UNKNOWN DIALOGUE

My poor father's letter, and his death, of which I was informed shortly after, produced a strong impression on me, all intoxicated though I was and dizzy with the noise of my spurs,—an impression strong enough to give a jolt to my blind ardour. I began to examine more closely and more calmly what was supernatural in the splendours that intoxicated me. For the first time I asked myself of what consisted this ascendency we allowed to be exercised over us, by men of action clad with absolute power. I even dared to make some inward effort to draw a limit to this voluntary yielding of so many men to one single man. This first shake-up made me half open an eyelid, and I was audacious enough to look the dazzling eagle square in the face. The eagle that had picked me up when I was a mere child, and whose talons gripped my loins.

I was not slow to find occasions for examining him more closely, and to spy out the spirit of the great man in the obscure actions of his private life.

They had dared to create pages, as I have told you. But we wore officers' uniforms, while awaiting the green livery with red breeches we would have to put on at the coronation. We acted as equerries, secretaries or aides-de-camp until then, according to the will of the master who accepted whatever he laid his hands on. Already he took pleasure in filling his anterooms, and as the craving to dominate pursued him everywhere, he could not keep from exercising it in the smallest matters, and he tormented those about him with the untiring infliction of his will.

He amused himself with my timidity. He played with my terror and my respectfulness. Sometimes he would call me brusquely. Then, when he saw me enter, pale and stammering, he would amuse himself by making me talk for a long while to see my astonishment and confuse my ideas.

Sometimes, while I was taking down his dictation, he would suddenly pull my ear—a way he had—and ask some irrelevant question

on some common science like geometry or algebra, proposing the simplest child's problem. At the time it seemed to me as if lightning were striking me. I knew a thousand times over whatever he quizzed me on. I knew more about it than he believed, sometimes even more than himself, but his eye would paralyse me.

When he was outside the room I could breathe again. The blood began to circulate in my veins and memory would return, and with it inexpressible shame. Rage would take me and I would write down what I should have answered. Then I would roll around on the floor and cry out and want to kill myself.

—"What!" I would ask myself, "is there really a head wise enough to be sure of everything and hesitate before no one? Men who daze themselves by action on all things, and whose assurance crushes others by making them believe that the key to all knowledge and all power, the key for which one does not cease to look, is in their pockets and they have but to open them in order to bring forth the light and infallible authority." Nevertheless, I felt that this was a false and usurped force. I revolted and shouted:

—"He lies! His attitude, his voice, his ges-

ture, are only an actor's pantomime, a miserable parade of sovereignty. He must know its vanity! He cannot possibly believe in himself so sincerely! He forbids all of us to lift the veil but he must see himself naked through it. And what does he see? A poor ignoramus like ourselves, and underneath it all a feeble creature!"

Yet I did not know how to see to the bottom of this disguised soul. Power and glory defended him on all points. I turned about it without succeeding in surprising a single thing; and the ever armed porcupine rolled in front of me, offering on all sides none but prickly points. One day, however, hazard, master of us all, pushed them apart for an instant, and between these spikes and darts, let out an instant of light. (Perhaps it was the only time in all his life.) One day he did encounter a stronger force than himself and he drew back for an instant before an ascendancy greater than his own. I witnessed it and felt myself avenged.

This is how it came about.

We were at Fontainebleau. The Pope had just arrived. The Emperor had awaited him impatiently for his coronation, and had re-

ceived him in a carriage, which they entered from either side at the same instant; apparently etiquette had been neglected; but indeed it had been deeply calculated so as not to cede or grasp a thing; an Italian ruse.

He came back to the castle, where everything was in an uproar. I had left several officers in the room ahead of the Emperor's room, and had remained alone in his. I was gazing at a long table which had a Roman mosaic top instead of a marble one. An enormous stack of letters and petitions overloaded it.

I had often seen Bonaparte enter here and subject these letters to a strange test. He did not take them up in their order, nor haphazard. But when their numbers irritated him, he would pass his hat over the table from left to right and from right to left, like a mower, and so scatter them until five or six were left which he would then open.

This scornful sort of game had moved me singularly. All these letters of mourning and distress rejected and flung on the floor as by an angry wind; the useless pleas of widows and orphans having no chance of help any more than the flying leaves swept by the consular hat; all these sobbing pages, wet with the tears

of mothers, draggling haphazardly under his boots; on which he walked as he walked on his dead of the battlefields, represented the present Fate of France, like a sinister lottery. No matter how great the rude, indifferent hand that drew the lots, I thought it was not just to yield up to the whim of his fist so many obscure fortunes which perhaps might have been as great as his own some day, if some support were given them.

I felt my heart rise in revolt against Bonaparte. But shamefully; like the slave's heart that it was. I considered these abandoned letters. Cries of unheeded grief rose from their profaned folds. And taking them up to read them, throwing them away again, I myself judged between these unfortunates and the Master to whom they had given themselves, and who would be planting himself this very day more solidly than ever upon their heads.

In my hand was one of these scorned petitions. Then the drums announced the immediate arrival of the Emperor. You know that, even as the flash of a cannon is seen almost before hearing the detonation, so Napoleon was always seen simultaneously with the clamour announcing his approach—so prompt were his

paces and so hurried did he seem to live and fling his actions one upon another. When he entered the palace court on horseback, his escorts had difficulty in following him, and the sentries had no time to snatch up their arms, before he already had dismounted and bounded up the stairway.

This time he had left the Pope's carriage and returned alone, ahead and at a gallop. I heard his heels clatter the same instant I heard the drums. I barely had time to jump in the alcove, where stood a big bed of state that no one used, and which was fortified by a princely balustrade, and fortunately more than half closed by curtains embroidered with bees.

The Emperor was much excited. He walked into the room alone like one who awaits something impatiently. In a twinkling he had paced its length three times. Then he approached the window and started to thrum a march on it with his nails. A carriage rolled into the courtyard. He stopped drumming, stamped his foot two or three times as if impatient at the sight of something that was being done slowly, and then he rushed to the door to open it for the Pope.

Pius VII entered alone. Bonaparte hur-

riedly shut the door after him, with the promptitude of a jailer. I felt greatly terrified to find myself a third in such company. But I remained voiceless, motionless, looking and listening with all the power of my senses.

The Pope was tall of stature. His face was long, yellow, ailing, but full of a holy nobility and limitless goodness. His black eyes were large and fine, his mouth half open with a benevolent smile to which his firm chin gave an expression of keen and quick spirituality. This smile smacked not of political harshness, but wholly of Christian kindness. A white cap covered his long black hair which was shot with silver. On his bent shoulders he wore carelessly a long, red velvet cape and his robe swept his feet.

He entered slowly with the quiet, careful step of an elderly woman. He sat down, eyes lowered, on one of the great Roman armchairs, gilded and loaded with eagles, and awaited what the other Italian had to say to him.

Ah! my dear sir! Such a scene! Such a scene! I can see it still.

It was not the genius of the man it showed me, but his character. And if his great spirit did not unfold, his heart at least flashed forth.

Bonaparte, then, was not as yet what you have since seen him to be. He did not have that financier's belly, that puffed sickly face, those gouty legs and all that infirm fat which art has unfortunately seized upon to make a "type" of him according to modern expression, and which has handed him down to the masses, that almost popular and grotesque form, which fits him to become a child's toy, and will leave him perhaps one day or another, fabulous and deformed like *Polichinelle*. He was not that way at all at the time, but supple, nervous, quick, keen and active, convulsive in his gestures, sometimes graceful, always careful of his manners. His chest was flat and sunken between the shoulders, and his face was still as I had seen it in Malta, melancholy and sharp-featured.

He never stopped pacing up and down the room after the Pope had entered. He began to roam around the armchair, like a prudent hunter, and stopped suddenly in front of it in the stiff, motionless attitude of a corporal. He took up the sequel to some conversation broached in the carriage, but interrupted by the arrival, and which he wanted to rush through.

—"I repeat, Holy Father, I am not at all strong-minded and I am not fond of arguers and idealists. I assure you that, in spite of my old Republicans, I shall attend mass."

He snapped these last words at the Pope brusquely, like a censer waved at his face, and stopped to watch the effect, thinking that the more or less impious circumstances preceding this interview should give this sudden and keen avowal an extraordinary value. The Pope lowered his eyes and put his two hands on the eagle heads that formed the arms of his chair. By this attitude, like a Roman statue, he seemed to say clearly: I resign myself in advance to hearing all the profanities he may be pleased to make me hear.

Bonaparte made the round of the room about the armchair, which stood in the centre. By the look he cast sideways upon the old pontiff, I could see that he was pleased neither with himself nor with his adversary, and that he reproached himself for having reopened this conversation so quickly. So he began to talk more circumspectly, always circling the room, casting sidelong glances into the long mirrors of the apartment, where the grave countenance of the Holy Father was reflected, and peer-

ing sharply at the Holy Father's profile whenever he passed close, but never looking him full in the face, for fear of seeming too anxious about the impression his words were making.

—"There is something," he said, "which continues to weigh on my heart, Holy Father. It is that you consent to the coronation in the same manner as the other time to the *Concordat*—as if you were forced to it. You have the air of a martyr before me. You sit there as if resigned, as if offering your woes to Heaven. But really, that is not your position. You are no prisoner, by God! You are free as the air!"

Pius VII smiled sadly and looked him in the face. He felt the prodigious in the demands of this despotic character. To it, as to all spirits of the same nature, it was not sufficient to make itself obeyed, unless in obeying people showed an ardent desire to do what he commanded.

—"Yes," resumed Bonaparte more forcefully, "you are perfectly free. You may return to Rome; the way is open, no one holds you back."

The Pope sighed and raised his right hand and lifted his eyes to Heaven without answer-

ing. Then he lowered his wrinkled brow very slowly and fell to contemplating the gold cross hung about his neck.

Bonaparte continued talking, turning about more slowly. His voice became mild and his smile very gracious.

—"Holy Father, if the gravity of your character did not prevent me, I should say that you are really a little ungrateful. You do not seem to remember enough the good services France has rendered you. The Conclave of Venice which elected you Pope was inspired by my Italian campaign and by a word I said about you—it looks a little that way to me! Austria was not treating you very well at the time, which distressed me very much. Your Holiness was compelled, I believe, to return to Rome by sea, because it was impossible to cross Austrian territory."

He broke off to await the response of Pius VII. But his silent host only bowed his head almost imperceptibly and remained as if plunged in a dejection which prevented him from listening.

Then Bonaparte pushed with his foot a chair close to the Pope's armchair. I trembled, for

in picking this seat, his shoulder had grazed the curtain of the alcove where I was hidden.

—"It was really as a Catholic," he continued, "that it distressed me. I never have had the time to study much theology, but I still attach a great faith to the power of the Church. It has a marvellous vitality, Holy Father. Voltaire has upset things a little, but I don't like him, and I am going to turn loose against him an old, unfrocked, oratorian monk. You will be satisfied, all right. Come, you and I might do a great many things in the future, if you cared to."

He assumed an air of innocence and of most caressing youthfulness.

—"I don't know, but for all my trying, I can't see really why you should have any repugnance against taking your seat at Paris for always! Why, I will leave the Tuileries to you, if you want. You already will find your Monte-Cavallo room there awaiting you. I hardly ever stay there. Don't you see clearly, Padre, that the real capital of the world is here? I will do anything you want. To begin with, I am a better child than people believe. Provided war and tiresome politics be left to me, you may arrange the Church any way you

please. I will be your soldier altogether. Look, it would be truly splendid. We would have our Councils like Constantine and Charlemagne. I will open them, and close them. Next I will put into your hands the real keys of the World, and as our Lord has said: 'I am come with the sword, so shall I keep the sword.' I shall only bring it to you for your blessing after each success of our arms."

He bent forward slightly when he uttered these words.

The Pope, who until then had remained motionless, like an Egyptian statue, slowly raised his bowed head and smiled sorrowfully. He lifted his eyes and said, with a quiet sigh, as if confiding his thought to his invisible guardian angel:

—*"Commediante!"*

Bonaparte bounded from his chair like a wounded leopard. A veritable fury possessed him, one of his yellow rages. First he paced without speaking, gnawing his lips till they bled. He no longer circled around his prey with sharp glances and stealthy tread. He moved straight and strong, lengthwise, widthwise through the room. He stamped his feet roughly and clattered his spurred heels. The

room quivered. The curtains shuddered, the way trees do when thunder approaches. Something big and terrible was going to happen, I thought. My hair hurt me, and in spite of myself I passed my hand through it. I looked at the Pope. He did not budge. But both his hands tightly gripped the eagles' heads on the arms of his chair.

The storm burst all of a sudden.

—"Comedian? I? Ah! I shall give you comedies that will make all of you weep like women and children. Comedian!! Ah! you are wrong if you think you can try your insolent composure on me! My playhouse is the world! The part I play is the part of master and creator! For actors I have the whole lot of you, Pope, Kings, Nations! And the string on which you dance is Fear! Comedian! Ah! You have to be bigger than you are to dare applaud or hiss me, *Signor Chiaramonti!* Do you realise you would be nothing but a poor curate if I wanted it? You and your tiara, France would sneer at you if I did not keep my face straight when bowing to you!

"Only four years ago, no one dared speak aloud of Christ. And who would have dared discuss the Pope, if you please? Comedian!

Ah! gentlemen, you quickly feel at home with us! You are ill-tempered because I have not been silly enough to sign the disapprobation of Gallican liberties, like Louis XIV! But you don't put it over on me that way! It is I that hold you in my hands. It is I that drag you from the South to the North like marionettes. It is I that make believe you count for something, because you represent an old idea I want to revive. And you haven't the sense to see it and to act as if you didn't notice it. Not at all! You must be told everything! You must have your nose rubbed into things to understand them. And you really think people have use for you, and you stick up your head and drape yourself in your woman's petticoats! But understand well that petticoats do not awe me in the least, and that if you continue, you! I will treat them the way Charles XII did those of the Grand Vizier: I will rip them with one kick of my spurs."

He kept still. I dared not breathe. I craned my neck, when I no longer heard his roaring voice, to see if the poor old man were not dead with fright. But I saw the same serenity in his attitude, the same serenity on his face! A second time he lifted his eyes to the

ceiling and after uttering another deep sigh he smiled bitterly and said:

—*"Tragediante!"*

At that moment Bonaparte was down the room, leaning on the marble chimney that was as tall as himself. He darted off like an arrow, rushing upon the old man. I believed he was going to kill him. But he stopped short. From the table he snatched up a Sèvres vase, painted with the castle of Saint-Angelo and the Capitol. He flung it down against the andirons, and crushed the pieces under his feet. Then suddenly he sat down and remained profoundly silent, formidably motionless.

I was relieved. I felt that sober thought had returned to him and that his brain had regained mastery over his seething blood. He became sad, his voice was dull and gloomy and from his first word I gathered that he was himself, and that this Proteus quelled by two words, was showing his true self.

—"Miserable life!" he said first. Then he mused, and tore the brim of his hat, without speaking for another minute. Emerged from his musings he went on, as if talking to himself:

—"It's true! Tragedian or Comedian. It

is all a part, all a masquerade for me, long since and for all time. Such weariness! Such littleness. To pose! Always to pose! Full face for this party, in profile for that individual, according to their notion. To appear the way they like me to be, and to guess correctly their imbecile's dreams! To keep them all between hope and fear. To dazzle them with data and bulletins, with prestige of distances and prestige of names. To be master of them all and not to know what to do with it. Upon my word, that's all! And after all that, to be bored the way I am, it is too much!"

He huddled into the armchair and crossed his legs.—"Truly, I am enormously bored! The moment I sit down, I die of ennui. I could not hunt around Fontainebleau for three days without perishing with dulness. I must keep going and make people keep going. If I knew where, I'd like to be hanged, by gad. I am speaking plainly to you. I have plans enough for the life of forty Emperors; I make one every morning and one every night. I have a tireless imagination. But I would not have time to fulfill two, before I should be used up body and soul. For our poor lamp does not burn long. And frankly, if all my plans should

be put through, I would not swear the world would be much happier for it. But it would be more beautiful, and a majestic unity would be reigning over it. I am not a philosopher, and I know only our Secretary of Florence who has had common sense. I see nothing in certain theories. Life is too short to stop and theorise. As soon as I have thought, I act! After I am gone, people will find plenty of explanations for my actions to raise me higher if I succeed, and belittle me if I fail. The paradoxes about it are all ready. They abound in France. I make them keep still while I am alive, but afterwards we shall see. No matter! My business is to succeed, and I understand that. I shall write my Iliad with deeds, day by day."

At this point he rose with a promptness that was almost gay, something alert and alive. He was natural and himself at that moment. He did not think at all of showing off the way he did afterwards in his dialogues of Saint Helena. He never thought of idealising himself and did not set forth his person in a manner to realise the finest philosophical conceptions. He was his true self, his inner self exteriorised.

He came back close to the Holy Father, who had not stirred, and walked in front of him. Then blazing up, half laughing in irony, he uttered the following, or very nearly. It is all intermixed with trivial and imposing words as was his wont, and delivered with the inconceivable volubility, the rapid expression of this quick and facile genius, which divined everything at once without effort.

—"Birth is everything! Those that come into the world poor and naked are always desperate. That turns into action or into suicide, according to the people's characters. When they have courage, like me, to put their hands on everything, they raise the devil. What do you expect? We have to live. We must find our place and make our little hole. I have shaped mine like a cannon ball. So much the worse for those that were in front of me. Some are content with little, others never have enough. What can you do about it? Everybody eats according to his appetite. And I was very hungry! Look here, Holy Father, at Toulon I did not have the price of a pair of epaulettes. Instead, I had on my shoulders a mother and God knows how many brothers. All that is fixed at present, all right enough

I hope. Josephine had married me, as if out of pity, and we are going to crown her in the face of Raguideau, her notary, who said I had only my sword and my cloak. My word, he was not wrong! Imperial cloak, crown, what does it all amount to? Is it mine? Masquerade costume! Actor's mummery! I shall put it on for an hour and have enough of it. Then I will put on my little officer's coat again and jump on my horse. Always to horse; all my life on horseback! I could not sit down a whole day without running the risk of being thrown out of my armchair. Am I really to be envied? What?

"I'll tell you, Holy Father! There are only two kinds of people in the world: those who possess and those who earn.

"The former lie low. The latter keep stirring. Because I have learned that young, and at the right moment, I shall go far. That's all! There are only two men that have arrived beginning after forty: Cromwell and Jean-Jacques! If you had given the one a farm and the other twelve hundred francs and his servant, they would have neither preached, nor commanded nor written. There are artisans in building, in colours, in forms and in words.

I am an artisan in battles. It's my trade. At thirty-five I have already manufactured eighteen of them; their names are *victories*. My work must be paid. To pay for it with a throne is not too high a price. Besides, I keep on working always. You will see a good many more. You will see all dynasties date from mine, newcomer though I am, and elected. Elected like you, Holy Father, and drawn from among the masses. On that point we can shake hands."

And, approaching, he held his white, brusque hand out to the withered and timid hand of the good Pope. Softened, perhaps by the good-natured tone of this last move of the Emperor's, perhaps by a secret reversion of thought to his own fate and the gloomy prospect of Christian society, Pius VII gave him the tips of his fingers, that still trembled, with the air of a grandmother who makes up with a child she has been grieved to have scolded too harshly. He sadly shook his head the while, and I saw a teardrop from his beautiful eyes, that rolled quickly down his livid, withered cheek. It seemed to me like the last farewell of dying Christianity, abandoning the earth to selfishness and hazard.

Bonaparte gave a furtive look at the tear he had wrung from this poor soul, and I even surprised, on one side of his mouth, a quick twitch which resembled a smile of triumph. At the moment this all-powerful nature appeared to me less lofty and less fine than that of his saintly opponent. It made me blush, behind my curtains, for all my past enthusiasm. I felt an entirely new sadness in discovering how the highest political greatness could become small through the heartless tricks of its vanity, its miserable pitfalls and its cunning baseness.

I saw that he had wanted nothing of his prisoner, and that it was a silent joy he had gained for himself by not failing in this interview. Having allowed himself to be surprised into anger, he had made his captive flinch under the emotion born of fatigue, fear and all the weaknesses that bring an inexplicable emotion to the eyelid of an elderly man.

Bonaparte had wished to have the last word and, without adding another, he left the room as brusquely as he had entered. I did not see whether he saluted the Pope. I do not think he did.

CHAPTER VI

A MAN OF THE SEA

As soon as the Emperor had left the apartment, two ecclesiastics came to the Pope and led him away, supporting him under either arm, dejected, tearful and trembling.

I stayed until night in the alcove, where I had overheard this discourse. My thoughts were confused and it was not the terror of this scene which predominated. I was overcome by what I had seen. And knowing now to what evil passes personal ambition may cause genius to stoop, I felt hatred against this passion which had blighted, under my very eyes, the most brilliant of tyrants, he who would probably give his name to the century for having retarded its progress ten years.

I felt the folly of devoting oneself to a single man, since despotic authority cannot fail to corrupt the feeble heart. But I knew no idea to which to devote myself henceforth. I have

told you that I was only eighteen at the time, and I possessed within me but the vaguest instinct of good, truth, and beauty, but obstinate enough, though, to stick forever to their research. That is the only thing I respect in myself.

I judged it was my duty to keep still about what I had witnessed. But I had reason to believe that my temporary disappearance from the Emperor's suite had been discovered, for this is what happened to me. In the Master's manner towards me I noticed no change whatever. Only I spent less time near him, and the close study of his character I had wanted to make was suddenly cut short. One morning I received orders to start instantly for the camp at Boulogne and, on my arrival, orders to embark upon one of the flat bottomed boats that were being tried out at sea.

I left with less regret than I would have felt if this trip had been announced to me prior to the Fontainebleau scene. I breathed when leaving that old castle and its forest, and this involuntary relief made me feel that my satellitism had received its deathblow. At first this new discovery saddened me, and I trembled for the dazzling illusion which had

made a duty of my blind devotion. The great egoist had revealed himself before me. But in proportion to the distance between us when I went away from him, I began to consider him in his exploits more than in his personality. And by this view of him, he regained over me a part of the magical power by which he fascinated the world.

Nevertheless, it was rather the gigantic conception of war, which henceforth appeared to me, than that of the man who represented it in such redoubtable fashion. And at this view I felt an extreme intoxication for the glory of battles renew itself within me. It silenced my grief for the master who ordered the battles, and it made me look with pride upon the perpetual labours of the men, all of whom appeared to me to be only his humble workers.

The conception was actually Homeric and fit to take in schoolboys with its dazzle of multiple activities. But something false was mixed up in it, nevertheless, and revealed itself to me vaguely, not distinctly as yet. I felt the need of a clearer view than mine to make me discover the foundation of it all. I began to learn to measure my Captain. I needed now to sound war!

A new event taught me my second lesson. For I received three harsh lessons in my life, and I am telling them to you after having meditated upon them every day. They were violent shocks for me and the last of them succeeded in overthrowing the idol of my soul.

The conspicuous demonstration of conquest of, and debarkation in, England, the memories of William the Conqueror freshly evoked, the discovery of Cæsar's camp at Boulogne, the sudden concourse of nine hundred vessels in that seaport, under the protection of a battle-fleet of five hundred sails constantly advertised,—all these tricks, as well as those of the establishment of training camps at Dunkirk and Ostend, Calais, Montreuil and Saint-Omer under the command of four field marshals; the military throne whence fell the first stars of the Legion of Honour; the reviews, the festivities, the partial attacks; all this glitter, when reduced to its simplest expression, as the language of geometry puts it, had only three ends: To worry England! To hush up Europe! To concentrate and enthuse the Army!

Those three points attained, Bonaparte dropped piece by piece the artificial machine

that he had set playing at Boulogne. When I arrived that machine was whirling in the emptiness as that at Marly. The generals still went through the motions of simulated ardour, but their hearts were not in it. Some hapless ships continued to be launched, scorned by the English who would sink them ever and anon. I was given a command on one of these craft, the very day after my arrival.

That day, one single English frigate stood out at sea. She tacked with majestic leisure. She came, she went, she put about, she keeled over and righted herself, preened, glided, stopped and played in the sun like a swan at its ablutions. The miserable flatboat, of newfangled and bad design, had greatly risked itself before with four other similar boats. And we were very proud of our audacity, launched as we had been since morning, when we suddenly discovered the peaceful antics of the frigate. Seen from shore, they no doubt would have appeared most graceful and poetic to us; or if only she had amused herself indulging in her frolics between England and ourselves! But she was, on the contrary, between us and France. The coast of Boulogne was more than a mile off. That set us thinking.

We did the best we could with our bad sails and our worse oars, and, while we were floundering about, the peaceable frigate continued taking her seabath and describing a thousand pleasing scrolls about us. She played riding school, changing her paces like a well-trained horse, tracing letters S and Z on the water in the most amiable fashion.

We noticed that she permitted us to pass before her several times without firing one gunshot, and she even drew her cannon inside suddenly and shut all her portholes. At first I believed this to be a most peaceful manœuvre, and I could make nothing of this courtesy.

But a rough old sailor nudged me and said: "Something bad is afoot." And actually, after having let us run before her like a mouse before a cat, that amiable and pretty frigate made for us full tilt, without deigning to fire. She rammed us with her bows like a horse with its chest—broke us, crushed us, sank us, and joyously passed on over us, leaving a few boats to fish out the prisoners. I was among them; the tenth. We had been two hundred when we started.

The pretty frigate was called the *Naïade*.

But, not to lose the French habit of playing on words, you may be sure that we did not fail to call her the "Noyade" afterwards.

The bath I had taken had been so rigorous, that they were on the point of throwing me back into the sea for dead, when an officer, in looking through my wallet, found my father's letter you have just read, and on it Collingwood's signature. He made them give me closer care. They discovered signs of life and when I came to, I was not on board the graceful *Naïade,* but on the *Victoire.*

I asked who was in command of this other ship. They answered me laconically: "Lord Collingwood."

I thought he must be the son of the one my father knew. But when I was brought before him I was undeceived. It was the man himself!

I could not contain my surprise when he told me, with an altogether paternal kindness, that he had not expected to be the keeper of the son, after having been the father's custodian, but that he hoped to fare no worse because of it. That he had been present during my father's last moments and that, having learned my name, he had wanted to have me on board his ship. He spoke to me in the best of French,

with a brooding tenderness, the impression of which has never left my memory. He offered to let me stay aboard his ship on parole if I would promise never to make any attempt at flight. I gave my word of honour unhesitatingly, after the manner of young men of eighteen, being much better off aboard the *Victory* than on some tub.

Amazed to see nothing to justify the prejudices against the English that had been inculcated in us, I became acquainted quite readily with the ship's officers. My ignorance about the sea and about their language amused them a great deal, and they found diversion in teaching me both, all the more courteously because their Admiral treated me like his son.

Nevertheless, a great sadness overwhelmed me whenever I saw the white coasts of Normandy from afar, and I would turn away so as not to weep. I resisted the desire I had to cry, because I was young and brave. But later, the moment my will no longer watched over my heart, the moment I lay down and slept, tears would come to my eyes in spite of myself and drench my cheeks and the cover of my bed to the point of waking me.

One evening particularly. Another French

brig had been taken. I had seen it perish at a distance without its having been possible to save a single one of the crew. In spite of the delicacy and repression of the officers, I had to hear the cries and hurrahs of the sailors who joyfully saw the expedition vanish and the sea swallow up, bit by bit, the avalanche which threatened to crush their country. All day I had withdrawn and hidden in the quarters Lord Collingwood had given me near his own, as if the better to signify his protection. When night came I went up on deck alone.

More than ever I felt the enemy all about me and I reflected with great bitterness upon my career cut short so soon. Already I had been a prisoner of war for one month and Admiral Collingwood, treating me with such great good-will in public, had spoken to me in private only once, the first day I had come aboard his ship. He was kind but cold and in his manner, as well as in that of the British officers, there was a point where all effusion ceased and where the policy of stiff formality presented itself like a barrier in every way. It was in this that the life among foreigners made itself felt.

I thought of this with a kind of terror while

considering my abject position, which might last until the end of the war. And the sacrifice of my youth, lost utterly in the shameful uselessness of the prisoner, seemed inevitable.

The frigate ran swiftly, under full sail, and I could not feel her go. I leaned my two hands on a rope and my forehead on my hands and, bowed like this, I gazed into the waters of the ocean. Their green and sombre depths gave me a sort of dizziness. The silence of the night was unbroken save by English shouts.

For an instant I hoped the ship might take me far from France, so I would no longer see, the next day, those straight, white coasts cut into the kindly, cherished soil of my poor country.

In this way, I thought, I would be freed from the perpetual desire this view gave me, and I would at least no longer suffer the torture of being unable even to think of escaping without dishonour. A torture of Tantalus, by which an avid thirst of country must devour me for a long, long time. I was overwhelmed with loneliness and I wished for some swift occasion when I should be killed. I dreamed of bringing about my death quickly and in the grave and splendid manner of the ancients. I

imagined an heroic end, worthy of those that had been the subject of so many discussions among us pages and warriors' children, the object of so much envy among my companions.

I fell into those musings which, at eighteen, resemble more a continuation of action and of battle than serious meditation, when some one gently touched my arm and, facing about, I saw standing behind me the good Admiral Collingwood.

His night glass was in his hand and he was in full dress uniform, with the severe British regimentals. He placed one hand on my shoulder in fatherly fashion, and I noticed a look of deep brooding in his big black eyes and on his forehead. His white hair, half powdered, fell quite unheeded over his ears. Through the even quiet of his voice and manner there ran an undertone of sadness, which struck me that evening particularly, and which filled me from the first with greater respect and attentiveness towards him.

—"Already you are sad, my boy," he said to me. "I have a few little things to say to you. Would you like to chat a bit with me?"

I stammered a few vague phrases of appreciation and politeness which probably did not

make sense, for he did not listen to them, and sat down on a bench, holding me by the hand. I was standing before him.

—"You have been a prisoner only a month," he went on, "and I have been one for thirty-three years. Yes, my young friend, I am a prisoner of the Sea. She guards me on all sides; waves, forever waves. I see only them, I hear only them. My hair was whitened under their foam, and my back was bowed a little beneath their spray. I have passed so little time in England, that I know it only by the charts. My country is an ideal being, which I have merely glimpsed, but which I serve like a slave and which grows the more severe with me the more I grow necessary to it. It is the common lot, and to have such chains is what we should desire most. But sometimes they are very heavy."

He broke off a moment and we were both silent. For I would not have dared say a word, seeing that he was about to go on:

—"I have reflected a great deal," he spoke again, "and I have questioned myself about my duty when I had you come on board my ship. I might have let you be taken to England. But there you might have fallen upon misery

from which I can always protect you, or upon despair from which also I hope to save you. I felt a very sincere friendship for your father and I shall give him a proof of it now. If he sees me, he will be satisfied with me, will he not?"

The Admiral was silent again and pressed my hand. He even bent forward in the darkness and looked at me closely to see how I took his words. But I was too much stupefied to answer him. He went on more quickly:

—"I have written already to the Admiralty to have you sent back to France at the first exchange of prisoners. But that might take a long time," he added, "and I won't hide it from you. For, beside the fact that Bonaparte does not lend himself readily to this procedure, few of us are being taken prisoners. Meanwhile, let me tell you that I should be glad to see you study the language of your enemies. You see that we know yours. If you care to, we will study together, and I will lend you Shakespeare and Captain Cook. Do not distress yourself, you will be free before I am, for if the Emperor does not make peace, I shall be prisoner for the rest of my life."

This tone of kindliness by which he asso-

ciated himself with me, established a comradeship between us in his floating prison, made me suffer for him. I felt that in this life of sacrifice and isolation, he had need of doing good to console himself secretly for the harshness of his mission of endless battling.

—"Milord," I told him, "before teaching me the words of a new language, teach me the thoughts by which you have attained this perfect serenity, this evenness of spirit which resembles happiness and which hides an eternal weariness. . . . Forgive me for what I am about to say to you, but I fear that this virtue is only perpetual dissembling."

—"You are deceiving yourself very much," he rejoined, "the sense of duty ends by dominating the spirit to such extent, as to enter into our character and to become one of its principal traits, just as healthy nourishment, perpetually taken, may change the volume of our blood and become one of the elements of our constitution. More than any man, perhaps, I have proven to what point self may come to be easily forgotten. But to lay aside man completely is impossible, and there are matters to which our hearts cling more closely than we might want."

Here he broke off and took his long glass. He rested it on my shoulder to observe a distant light which glided along the horizon, and knowing at once by its motion what it was, he said:

—"Fishing boats!" He came close to me, sitting on the deck of the ship. I perceived that he had been wanting for quite a while to tell me something that he did not broach. Then, suddenly:

—"You never speak to me of your father. I am astonished that you do not ask me about him, about his sufferings, about his words, his wishes!"

And as the night was very clear, I saw again that I was being closely observed by those big black eyes.

—"I was afraid of being indiscreet," I answered, embarrassed.

He pressed my arm, as if to prevent my saying more.

—"That is not it, my child, that is not it!"

And he shook his head, doubtfully and kindly.

—"I have found few occasions to talk with you, Milord."

—"Still less," he interrupted. "You would

have talked to me about that every day, if you had cared to."

I noticed some agitation and a little of reproach in his accent. That was what he had at heart. I bethought myself of another foolish reply to justify myself. Nothing makes us so silly as false excuses.

—"Milord, the humiliating sense of being a captive engrosses me more than you can think." And I remember I believed, when saying this, that I took on an air of dignity and a manner like Regulus, fit to give him a great respect for me.

—"Ah, poor boy, poor child!—poor boy," he called me—"You are not right. You don't go down into yourself. Search well, and you will find an indifference for which you are not responsible as much as is the military destiny of your poor father."

He had opened up the way to Truth, and I let her start.

—"I certainly did not know my father," I said. "I barely saw him once, at Malta."

—"There is the truth!" he exclaimed. "There is the cruelty, my friend! Some day my two daughters will speak like that. They will say: *'We do not know our father!'* Sarah and Mary

will say it! And yet, I love them with an ardent and tender heart, I bring them up from afar, I watch them from my ship, I write them every day, I direct their studies, their work, I send them thoughts and sentiments, I receive in exchange their childish confidences. I rebuke them, I calm down, I make up with them. I know all they do! I know what day they have gone to church in too fine dresses. I give their mother instructions about them continually. I can see in advance who will love them, who will woo them, who will marry them. Their husbands shall be my sons. I am making pious, simple women of them. No one can be more a father than I am. . . . Well, it counts for nothing. For they don't see me."

He spoke these last words in a moved voice, beneath which I felt tears. . . . After a moment's silence he went on:

—"Yes, Sarah has never sat on my lap since she was two years old, and I have held Mary in my arms only when her eyes had not yet opened. Yes, it is right that you have been indifferent about your father and that they will grow so about me some day. One doesn't love an invisible person.

"What is their father to them? A letter

each day. A more or less chilly counsel. Nobody loves advice; they love a being. And a being they do not see, does not exist; they do not love him. And when he is dead, he is no more absent than he already was,—and they do not weep for him."

He choked, and stopped. Not wishing to pursue this sentiment of grief before a stranger, he moved away. He walked about awhile and paced the deck, back and forth. At first I was greatly moved at the sight of this, and it was remorse he made me feel for not having felt enough what a father means. To this evening I owed the first good, natural, sane emotion my heart had experienced. By these profound regrets, by this insurmountable grief amidst the most brilliant military splendour, I understood all I had lost through not knowing the love of home, which could leave in a great heart such poignant regrets. I understood all the artificiality there was in our barbaric, brutal education, in our insatiable need of dazzling activity.

As by a sudden revelation of the heart I saw that here was an adorable and regrettable life from which I had been violently snatched. A true life of paternal love in exchange for

which a false life had been built for me, made up of hatred and all manner of puerile vanities. I understood that there was but one thing more beautiful than home, one thing to which this might be offered up in sanctity: it was that other home, the country! And while the brave old man who was moving away from me wept because he was good, I put my head in my two hands and wept because thus far I had been so wicked.

After a few minutes the Admiral returned to me:

—"I must tell you," he resumed in a firmer tone, "that we shall not delay pulling closer to France. I am placed an eternal sentinel before your seaports. I have only one word to add, and I wanted it to be between ourselves. Remember that you are here on parole, and that I shall not watch you at all. But, my child, the more time goes by, the greater will be your trial. You are still very young. If temptation should become too strong for your courage to resist, come to me when you are afraid of succumbing, and do not hide from me. I may save you from a dishonourable deed which some officers have committed to the detriment of their reputations. Remember, it is

permitted to break the chain of a galley slave if you can, but never your word of honour."

He left me upon these last words, pressing my hand.

I do not know, sir, whether you have noticed in life, that the revolutions which take place in our souls often depend on one day, one hour, one memorable and unforeseen conversation which shakes us and drops a new seed into us that sprouts slowly and of which the remainder of our actions are merely the sequel and the natural outgrowth. Such were for me the afternoon at Fontainebleau and the night on the British vessel.

Admiral Collingwood left me a prey to a new conflict. That within me which had been only a profound weariness, an immense and youthful impatience to be doing, became an ungovernable need of country, a homesickness! To see how suffering had at length preyed upon a man always separated from the mother country, made me feel a great rush for knowing and adoring mine. I conjured up passionate ties, which in fact did not await me at all. I imagined I had a family and fell to musing about parents I had barely known and which I reproached myself for having not cher-

ished enough. While in fact, accustomed to count me for naught, they had lived in their coldness and egoism, perfectly indifferent to my abandoned and ruined existence.

In this way even the good in me turned bad. In this way, the sage advice the brave Admiral had believed it his duty to give me, had come to me completely enveloped with his own emotion which spoke to me louder than himself. His troubled voice had touched me more than the wisdom of his words. And while he believed he was tightening my chain, he had more keenly roused in me the unbridled desire to break it.

It goes this way nearly always with all written or spoken advice.

Experience, only, and the reasoning which springs from our own reflections, are able to teach us. Look, you who have to do with it, look at the uselessness of literature. Of what use is it? Whom do you convert? And by whom are you ever understood, if you please? Nearly always you make the cause *against* which you are pleading, succeed. See, there is one of you who makes "Clarisse" the most beautiful of epic poems on the virtue of woman; then what happens? Someone takes the other

side, the side of Lovelace, whom she outshines by her virginal splendour, which the rape itself has not tarnished, of Lovelace, who goes on his knees to implore the forgiveness of his sacred victim, and cannot unbend that soul, whose body had failed to drag it down in its fall; everything is all wrong in your teachings. You are of no use whatever but to stir up vices which, proud of the way you paint them, come to admire themselves in your picture and think themselves beautiful.

True, it does not matter to you; but my simple and splendid Collingwood had actually made a friend of me, and my conduct was not a matter of indifference to him. Hence he took much pleasure at first in seeing me devoted to serious and constant study. In my habitual reserve and my silence he also found something sympathetic to English stolidity, and he grew accustomed to open his heart to me on many an occasion and to confide matters to me that were not without importance. After awhile I was looked upon as his secretary and his relative, and I spoke English well enough not to seem a stranger any longer.

Nevertheless it was a cruel life I was leading and I found the gloomy days at sea very

long. For whole years we never stopped roaming around France and ceaselessly I saw sketched upon the horizon the coasts of this land which Hugo Grotius has called: "The most beautiful Kingdom next to that of Heaven." Then we would put to sea again and for whole months there would be nothing about me but fogs and mountains of water. When a ship passed near us or far from us, it would be English. None other was permitted to give itself up to the winds, and the ocean no longer heard a word that was not English. The English themselves were dejected and complained that the ocean, these days, had become a desert where they encountered one another eternally, and Europe a fortress which was closed to them.

Sometimes my wooden prison would come so close to shore that I could make out men and children on the beach. Then my heart would beat fast, and an inward rage devour me with such violence, that I would hide in the hold so as not to succumb to the desire to jump in and swim for it. But when I had come back to the indefatigable Collingwood, I would be ashamed of my childish weaknesses, I could never tire admiring how with so pro-

found a melancholy he united such aggressive courage. This man, who had known nothing but war and waves these forty years, never ceased to apply himself to the study of them as to an inexhaustible science. When one ship gave out, he climbed on board another, like a pitiless horseman. He used them and killed them under him. He wore out seven with me. He passed the nights fully dressed, sitting on his cannons, all the time figuring out the art of keeping his vessel stockstill, a sentry, in the same spot at sea, without anchoring, despite wind and current. He was forever training his crews, watching out over them and for them. This man had enjoyed no riches whatever. And though he was called a Peer of England, he loved his pewter soup bowl like any sailor. Then, returning to his cabin, he became the family father again and wrote to his daughters not to play the fine lady; to read, not novels, but tales of travel, essays and Shakespeare as often as they pleased. He wrote:

—"We have had a fight on the birthday of my little Sarah"—after the battle of Trafalgar which I had the grief to see him win,

and the plans of which he had drawn with his friend, Nelson, whom he succeeded.

Sometimes he felt his health giving way. He would ask England for relief. But the inexorable answered him: 'Stay at sea,' and offered him some dignity, or a gold medal for each fine action. His breast was overloaded with them. Again he wrote:

—"Since I have left my country, I have not spent ten days in any port. My eyes are weakening. When I shall be able to see my children, the sea will have made me blind. I lament that out of so many officers it is so difficult to find me a substitute of superior ability." England replied: 'You will stay at sea, always at sea.' And at sea he remained until his death.

This life, Roman and imposing, crushed me by its simplicity, when I had contemplated it only one day in its grave and thoughtful resignation. I scorned myself a great deal, I, who was nothing as a citizen, nothing as a father, nor as a son, nor as a public man, for complaining when he did not complain. He had never let himself be fathomed despite himself but once, and I, useless child—I, an ant among ants that crowded around the feet of the Sultan of France—I reproached myself

for my secret desire to return and offer myself up to the hazard of his whims and to become again one of the grains of the dust he would be kneading with blood.

The meeting with this true citizen, devoted, not—as I had been—to one man, but to country and duty, was a fortunate one for me. For I learned, in this severe school, that that is the veritable greatness we must henceforward seek amidst arms and how high—if well understood—it lifts our profession above all others. It may keep worthy of admiration the memory of some of us, no matter what the future of war and armies may be.

No man ever possessed to any higher degree this inward peace born of the sense of sacred duty, and the modest carefreeness of the soldier to whom it matters little if his name be famous, provided the public weal prospers. One day I saw him write:

"To maintain the independence of my country is the foremost will of my life and I would rather my body be added to the rampart of the country than dragged in futile pomp through an idle mob. To England are due my life and my strength. Do not speak of

my last wound, it might be believed that I glorify myself because of my danger."

His melancholy was profound, but full of greatness. It did not keep him from perpetual activity and he gave me the measure of what an intelligent fighting man should be, professing not for ambition's, but for art's sake the Art of War. The man who judges it loftily and often scorns it like Montecuccoli, who retired after Turenne's death, because he no longer deigned to take the part against an ordinary player.

But I was still too young to comprehend all the merits of this character and what appealed to me most was the ambition to hold, in my own country, a rank similar to his. When I saw the Kings of Southern Europe beg his protection, and even Napoleon stir with the hope that Collingwood might be in the Indian Ocean, I came to calling down even in my prayers for the chance to escape and I pressed the ambition which I always nursed nearly to the point of breaking my parole. Yes, I went as far as that.

One day, the ship, the *Ocean,* which bore us, put into Gibraltar. I went on shore with the Admiral, and walking alone through the

town I met an officer of the 7th Hussars who had been made a prisoner in the Spanish campaign and taken to Gibraltar with four of his comrades. They had the town for a prison, but they were closely watched.

I had known this officer in France. We were pleased to meet again, and in situations very nearly similar. It had been so long since a Frenchman had spoken French to me, that I thought him eloquent, although he was perfectly silly. After a quarter of an hour we revealed our situations to each other. Right away he told me frankly that he intended to escape with his comrades. That they had found an excellent opportunity and that he would not let himself be told twice to follow them. He urged me strongly to do likewise. I answered him that he was very lucky for being watched. But that I, who was not, could not escape without dishonour and that he, his companions and myself were not in the same boat. That seemed too fine a point to him.

—"My word!" he said to me, "I am no hair-splitter, and if you care to I shall send you a bishop who will tell you his opinion on it. But in your place I would go. I can see but two things—being free—or not. Do you know

that your promotion has been lost during the five years that you have been dragging around in that English tub? The lieutenants of your day are already colonels."

Thereupon his companions came up, and took me along into a very bad looking house where they drank sherry, and there they cited so many captains become generals, and sub-lieutenants become viceroys, that my head turned, and I promised them to be in the same spot, the day after the next at midnight.

We were to be taken from there in a small yawl they had hired from honest smugglers who would take us aboard a French vessel chartered to take wounded of our Army to Toulon. The project seemed an admirable one to me. And my fine companions, having made me drink off glass after glass to quiet the whisperings of my conscience, ended their discourse with a victorious argument. They swore by their own heads that I might have, at the strictest, some regard for a brave man who had treated me well, but that everything confirmed their certainty that a Britisher was not a man.

I returned on board the *Ocean* quite thoughtful, and went to sleep. When I awak-

ened and saw my position clearly, I asked myself if my fellow patriots had not been making fun of me. Nevertheless, the desire for liberty and an ever keen ambition, aroused since my childhood, drove me to the escape, despite the shame I felt for being false to my oath. I passed the entire day with the Admiral without daring to look him in the face, and I endeavoured to find him inferior and narrow-minded.

At table I spoke quite loud and arrogantly about Napoleon's greatness. I became exalted, I bragged of his universal genius which divined the laws while making the codes, and the future while shaping events. I dwelt insolently upon the superiority of this genius, compared to the mediocrity of the talents of the tacticians. I hoped to be contradicted. But contrary to my expectation, I met among the British officers still more admiration for the Emperor than I could show for this implacable enemy of theirs.

Lord Collingwood, especially, emerged from his gloomy silence and his continuous meditations. He praised him in terms so just, so forceful, so exact, and made his officers view, at the same time, the greatness of the Em-

peror's prevision, the magic quickness of his execution, the firmness of his orders, the sureness of his judgment, his penetration in negotiations, his clearness of ideas in counsels, his greatness in battle, his calm in danger, his constancy in preparing enterprises, his pride in the altitude given to France, and in reality all the qualities that composed the great man, that I asked myself what history could ever add to this eulogy. I was floored. For I had tried to rouse my ire against the Admiral in the hope of hearing him proffer unjust charges.

Wickedly, I had wanted to put him in the wrong and that one ill considered or insulting phrase on his part might serve to justify the disloyalty I contemplated. But he seemed, on the contrary, to be doing his utmost to redouble his kindness. And as his assiduity made the others suppose I had some new sorrow for which it was right to console me, they were all more attentive and indulgent towards me than ever. It disgusted me and I left the table.

The next day the Admiral took me to Gibraltar again, to my misfortune. We had to spend a week there.

The evening of the escape arrived.

My head whirled. I deliberated all the time. I allowed specious motives and I became dizzy with their falsity. A violent conflict raged within me. But while my spirit wrenched and wrestled with itself, my body followed all alone the road of flight, as if it were the arbiter betwixt ambition and honour.

Without being aware of it myself, I had made a bundle of my clothes, and I went on my way from the house in Gibraltar where we were, to the meeting place, when suddenly I stopped short, and felt that it was impossible.

There is something poisonous in a shameful deed which can be tasted by a gallant man when his lips touch the rim of the beaker of perdition. He cannot even sip of it without being ready to die of it.

When I realised what I was about to do, that I was going to break my parole, such a terror took hold of me, that I believed I had gone mad. I ran to the beach and from the fatal hovel as from a pesthouse, not daring to turn and look at it. I jumped in and swam, and during the night, I boarded our ship, the *Ocean,* my floating prison. I climbed aboard transported, clutching the ropes. Arriving on deck, I gripped the mainmast, and clung to

it passionately, as if to a refuge which guarded me against dishonour. And at the same time, the sense of the greatness of my sacrifice tearing my heart, I fell to my knees and, resting my head against the iron girders of the big mast, burst into tears like a child.

The skipper of the *Ocean* found me in this state and believed, or pretended to believe, I was ill. He had me carried to my cabin. I begged him to place a sentinel at my door to prevent my going out. They shut me in, and I breathed to be relieved at last from the torture of being my own jailer. The next day, at daylight, I saw we were out at sea, and I calmed down a bit for losing sight of land, the object of all the miserable temptation of my situation. I thought of it more resignedly, when my little door opened and the good Admiral entered alone.

—"I have come to say good-bye," he began looking less grave than usual. "You are leaving for France to-morrow morning."

—"Oh, my God. Is it to test me that you tell me that, Milord?"

—"That would be a very cruel game, my boy," he rejoined. "Already I have been very wrong towards you. I should have left you a

prisoner on the *Northumberland* and given you back your word. Then you might have plotted against your keepers without remorse, and used your wits, without scruple, to make your escape. You have suffered more, having had more freedom. But thank God! you resisted an opportunity yesterday, which would have dishonoured you. It would have meant shipwreck in the harbour, for since two weeks past I have been negotiating for your exchange, and Admiral Rosily has just secured it. I trembled for you yesterday for I knew of the project of your comrades. I have let them escape for your sake, lest in arresting them they would arrest you. And what could we have done to hide that? You would have been lost, my boy, believe me, you would have been badly received by Napoleon's old braves. They have the right to be testy as to honour."

I was so confused that I did not know how to thank him. He saw my embarrassment and, hastening to cut short the poor phrases in which I tried to stammer that I regretted it, he continued:

—"Come, come, none of what we call French compliments. We are satisfied with each other, that's all. And your people have,

I believe, a proverb that says: *There is no beautiful prison.* Let me die in mine, my friend. I am used to mine, I have jolly well had to be. But it won't last much longer. I feel my legs shaking under me and getting thin. For the fourth time I have asked Lord Mulgrave to be retired, and he has again refused me. He writes that he does not know how to replace me. When I am dead, they shall have to find some one nevertheless, and it would do no harm to take precautions. I am to remain on sentry in the Mediterranean. But you, my boy, don't lose time. There is a sloop that will take you. I have only one thing to suggest to you, that is to devote yourself to a principle rather than to a man. The love of your country is one big enough to fill a whole heart and keep busy an entire intelligence."

—"Alas! Milord," I answered, "there are times when it is not easy to know what the country wishes. I am going to ask it of mine!"

Once again we said good-bye and with a full heart I left this worthy man. I learned of his death shortly after. He died out at sea, the way he had lived for forty-nine years, without complaining, without glorying and without

having seen his two daughters again. Alone and sombre like one of those old hounds of Ossian's that guard eternally the coasts of England amidst the waves and the fogs.

At his school I had learned all that the exiles of war may suffer and all that the sense of duty may quell in a great soul. Thoroughly imbued with this example and grown more serious by my sufferings and the sight of his, I went to Paris to present myself, with my prison experience, to the all-powerful master I had left.

CHAPTER VII

THE RECEPTION

WHEN Captain Renaud broke off, I looked at my watch. It was two hours after midnight. He got up and we went among the Grenadiers. Deep silence reigned everywhere. A good many had sat down on their knapsacks and fallen asleep there. We sat down ourselves a few steps away, on the parapet, and he continued his story after having relighted his cigar at the pipe of a soldier. Not a house showed a sign of life.

The moment I arrived in Paris, I wanted to see the Emperor. I had the opportunity at a play at Court, to which one of my old comrades, become a colonel, took me. It was down there, at the Tuileries. We sat down in a small box, opposite the Imperial box, and we waited. Only the Kings were in the hall as yet. Each of these, in a first tier box,

had his court around him, and before him in the galleries were his aides-de-camp and his generals. The Kings of Westphalia, Saxony and Wurtemburg, all the princes of the Rhine Federation were placed in the same row. Murat, King of Naples, shaking his black hair curled like a mane and casting leonine glances, stood near them, talking loud and fast. Higher up was the King of Spain, and alone, shoved aside, the Russian Ambassador, Prince Kourakim, with diamond epaulettes. In the pit the crowds of generals, dukes, princes, colonels and senators. Everywhere above, the bare arms and shoulders of the ladies of the Court.

The box surmounted with the eagle was still empty. We never took our eyes off it. After a little while the Kings rose and remained standing. The Emperor entered the box alone, walking rapidly, threw himself quickly into his chair and gazed in front of him. Then he remembered that the entire hall was on its feet and awaiting a glance. He bobbed his head twice, brusquely and with bad grace, turned quickly and allowed the Queens and Kings to sit down. His chamberlains, dressed in red, stood up behind him. Occasionally he talked to them without looking at them, holding out

his hand to receive a gold box, which one of them handed him and took back again. Crescentini sang *Les Horaces,* with the voice of a seraph coming out of a hectic, wrinkled face. The orchestra was soft and weak, by order of the Emperor. He wanted, perhaps, like the Lacedemonians to be soothed rather than excited by the music. He ogled in front of him, and very often in my direction. I recognised his large greyish-green eyes, but I did not like the yellow fat which had swallowed up his severe features. He put his left hand over his left eye to see better, as was his wont. I felt he had recognised me. He jerked around, looked at nothing save the stage, and soon went out. He walked rapidly through the corridor, and his fat legs bulging in white silk stockings, his puffy figure in the green coat, almost made him unrecognisable to me. He stopped short in front of me, and speaking to the colonel who presented me, instead of addressing his words to me direct:

—"Why have I not seen him anywhere? —Still a lieutenant?"

—"He has been a prisoner since 1804."

—"Why did he not escape?"

—"I was on parole," I murmured.

—"I don't like prisoners," he said. " 'Twere better to be killed." He turned his back on me. We remained without stirring, lined up. And when all his suite had filed past:

—"*Mon cher,*" the colonel said to me, "you can see readily that you were an imbecile. You have lost your promotion and you are not liked any the better for it."

CHAPTER VIII

THE RUSSIAN GUARD

"Is it possible?" I said, stamping my foot. When I hear such stories I applaud the fact that the officer in me has been dead these several years. There remains only the solitary and independent scribe who considers what is to become of his freedom, and who does not want to defend it against his old friends.

And I believed I saw in Captain Renaud traces of indignation at the memory of what he was relating to me. But he smiled quietly and with a contented expression.

He resumed:

It was all very simple. That colonel was the finest chap in the world. But there are men who are, to use the celebrated phrase, *braggarts of crimes* and of hardheartedness. He wanted to maltreat me because the Emperor had set the example; gross flattery of the Guard Corps.

But how fortunate it was for me. From that day on, I began to esteem myself inwardly, to have confidence in myself, to make my character become purer, form itself, round itself out, become firmer. From that day on I realised clearly that events go for naught, that the inward man is everything. I placed myself well above my judges. Finally my consciousness began to make itself felt. I resolved to lean on it alone, and to regard public judgments, glittering rewards, rapid fortunes, reputations of the bulletin, like so many ridiculous boastings, like a game of chance with which it was not worth busying oneself.

Very soon I plunged into the war, amid unknown ranks of the infantry of the line, the infantry of battle, in which the peasants of the army were mowed down by the thousand at a time, similar to, equal to, the wheat of a fat field of the Beauce. There I hid myself like a friar in his cell. And down in this mob of the Army marching on foot like the privates, carrying a knapsack and eating their bread, I went through the great wars of the Empire as long as the Empire stood.

Ah! If you knew how comfortable I felt amidst these unheard of hardships! How I

loved this obscurity and what savage joys the great battles gave me! The beauty of war lies among the privates, in camp life, in the mud of the marching and the camping. I avenged myself on Bonaparte in serving my country, owing nothing to Napoleon. And when he passed before my regiment, I hid myself lest he show me favours. Experience had made me measure dignities and power at their true value. I no longer aspired to a thing except to take from each victory of our arms that portion of pride which would be my due according to my own feeling. I wanted to be a citizen where it was still permitted to be one, and that in my own way. At one time my services remained unnoticed, at another they were raised above their merit, and I never stopped keeping them dark, with all my power, fearing above all that my name would be too loudly mentioned. The crowd was so big, that obscurity came easy, and in 1814 I still was only a lieutenant in the Imperial Guard, when I received this wound you see on my forehead, and which causes me more trouble to-night than ordinarily.

At this Captain Renaud passed his hand

over his forehead and as it appeared that he wanted to keep silent I pressed him to go on, with enough insistence to make him give in.

He leaned his head on the knob of his malacca cane and continued:

Here is a singular thing: I have never told all this, and this evening I like to tell it. Bah! No matter! I like to let myself go with an old comrade. For you it will be the subject for serious reflection when you have nothing better to do. It is not unworthy of that, it seems to me. You will think me very weak or very mad; but it's all the same. Until the happening I am going to tell you about and of which I put off the telling in spite of myself, because it pains me—though it is a common enough happening to others—my love of the glory of arms had become wise, grave and utterly pure, as should be the simple and single sense of duty. But from that day on, other thoughts again came to cast a shadow on my life.

It was in 1814. It was the beginning of the year and the end of that dark war in which our poor army defended the Empire and the Emperor, and in which France looked upon

the battle in dismay. Soissons had just surrendered to the Prussian Bülow. The armies of Silesia and of the North had effected their junction there. Macdonald had left Troyes and abandoned the basin of the Yonne to establish his line of defence from Nogent to Monterreau with thirty thousand men.

We were to attack Rheims, which the Emperor wanted to retake. The weather was dark and it rained continuously. The day before we had lost a superior officer who was convoying the prisoners. The Russians had surprised and killed him the preceding night, and set their comrades free. Our colonel, who was what they call a *dur à cuire,* wanted to get even. We were near Epernay and we turned the heights surrounding it. Night fell and, after spending the whole day getting ourselves together, we passed by a fine white château with towers, called Boursault, when the colonel called me. He took me aside, while the guns were being stacked, and said in his old, hoarse voice:

—"You see a barn up there, don't you, on that steep hill yonder, where that big loafer of a Russian sentry is strutting, with his bishop's hat?"

—"Yes, yes," I answered, "I can see the grenadier and the barn perfectly."

—"Well, you are an old hand, you ought to know that yonder is the point the Russians took day before yesterday, and which bothers the Emperor most this particular quarter of an hour. He has told me it is the key to Rheims and perhaps it is. At any rate we are going to play a trick on Woronzoff. At eleven to-night you'll take two hundred of your 'boys,' and you will surprise the watch set in that barn. But, lest an alarm is raised, you will put that through with the bayonet."

He took, and offered me, a pinch of snuff, and throwing the rest away, little by little, the way I am doing here, he said to me, pronouncing a word to each grain of snuff thrown to the winds:

—"You understand all right that I will be there, back of you, with my column. You'll hardly have lost sixty men; you will have the six guns they have placed there. . . . You will turn them upon Rheims. . . . At eleven . . . half-past eleven . . . the position will be ours. And we will sleep till three . . . to rest a little . . . from that little affair at Craonne . . . which had no flies on it . . . as they say."

—"Very well," I told him. And I went with my second in command, to make some little preparation for our evening's party. The essential thing, as you see, was to make no noise. I made an inspection of the rifles and had the cartridges taken out of all the loaded ones, with the wad-hook. Next I walked around with my sergeants a bit, while waiting for the hour.

At ten-thirty I made them put their overcoats over their uniforms and hide their rifles under the coats; for whatever you do, as you may notice to-night, the bayonet always shows. And though it was dark as it is now, I did not trust to it. I had noticed the narrow lanes, bordered with hedges, that led to the Russian sentry-post, and up them I sent the most determined gang of rascals I have ever commanded. Two of them are still there, in the ranks. They were there and remember it well.

They knew the Russians' custom and how to capture them. The sentries we met going up disappeared without noise, like reeds that are bent to the ground with the hands. The one before the rifles required more care. He stood stock-still, rifle at his heel, chin on the muzzle. The poor devil rocked back and forth like a

man falling asleep from weariness and about to topple over. One of my grenadiers took him in his arms, squeezing him till he choked, and two others gagged and dropped him in the underbrush. I came on slowly and I could not help myself—I admit it—against a certain emotion I had never felt at other moments of battle. It was the shame of attacking sleeping men. There they were, rolled in their overcoats, under a dark lantern. My heart beat violently. But suddenly, on the instant of action, I feared this was only a weakness; one that resembled cowardice. I feared I had known fear this once!

And so, taking my sword from under my arm, I went in first, brusquely, setting the example to my grenadiers. I flung them a gesture they understood. They threw themselves first upon the weapons, next upon the men, like wolves on the flock. Oh, it was a dumb and horrible butchery! The bayonet pierced, the butt crushed, the knee smothered, the hand strangled. Every cry was silenced beneath the feet of our soldiers before it was barely uttered. No head lifted but received the death blow.

As I went in I had struck at random, one terrific blow straight ahead of me, at some-

thing black which I pierced through and through. An old officer, a large and strong man, white hair bristling on his head, rose up like a phantom. He saw what I had done and uttered a horrible cry, and struck a violent sword thrust at my face. The next instant he fell dead under the bayonets.

I, too, went down beside him, dizzy with the blow between my eyes. And underneath me I heard the dying, tender voice of a child, that lisped: "Papa."

Then I understood the thing I had done. I contemplated it with frenzied assiduity. I saw one of those fourteen year-old officers so numerous in the Russian armies that invaded us at the time, and who were trained in this terrible school. His long curly hair fell to his breast, as blond, as silky as a woman's, and his head was bent as if he only just had fallen asleep again. His rosy lips, open like those of a new-born babe, still seemed moist with his mother's milk and his big, blue, half-open eyes were beautifully shaped, candid, caressing, feminine. I lifted him by one arm and his head fell on my bloody cheek, as if he were nestling his head between his mother's neck and shoulders, to get warm. He seemed to

huddle on my breast to escape his murderers. The filial tenderness, the confidence and peacefulness of sweet sleep rested on his dead face and he seemed to be saying: "Let us sleep in peace!"

—"Was that an enemy?" I cried out! Whatever fatherly feeling God has put into the bowels of any man was touched and trembling within me. I hugged the poor infant to my breast. Then I felt pressing against me the hilt of my sword which had transfixed the heart and killed the sleeping seraph.

I wanted to hang my head on his, but my blood smirched him with big blotches. I felt the wound in my head—and I remembered it had been struck by his father. Shamefacedly I looked beside me and I saw nothing but a tangle of corpses my grenadiers were pulling by the legs to throw outside, only taking their cartridges away from them.

At that moment the colonel entered, followed by his column. I heard their tread and their weapons.

—"Bravo! my dear sir," he said to me, "you pulled this off quickly. But are you wounded?"

—"Look at this," I said. "What difference is there between me and a murderer?"

—"Why, by God, my dear fellow, what do you expect? It is our trade!"

—"Correct," I answered, and rose to take my command again. The child fell back in the folds of his mantle in which I wrapped him, and his little hand, adorned with heavy rings, dropped a malacca cane. It fell into my hand, as if it were being given to me. I took it. I resolved that henceforth I would carry no other weapon, no matter what might be my danger. I did not have the heart to draw my cut-throat sword out of his breast.

Hurriedly I left the den that reeked with blood, and when I came outside, I found the strength to wipe off my red, wet forehead. My grenadiers stood in line. Each one was coolly cleaning off his bayonet on the grass, and refastening the flintlock of his rifle. My sergeant-major, followed by the quartermaster, passed along the ranks, the roll in his hand and calling it by the light of a candle stuck in the muzzle of his gun, like a torch. He was serenely mustering the men. I leaned against a tree, where the surgeon-major came to bandage my forehead. A heavy March rain, falling on my bare head, did me some good. I could not help sighing deeply.

—"I am tired of war," I said to the surgeon.

—"So am I," said a grave voice which I recognised.

I raised the bandage over my eyebrows and saw before me, not Napoleon the Emperor, but Bonaparte the soldier. He was alone, on foot, brooding. He stood before me, his boots sunk in the mud, his coat torn; the rain streamed from the rim of his hat. He felt his last days were come, and looked about him at his last soldiers.

He considered me attentively. —"I have seen you somewhere, *grognard,*" he said.

By this last word I knew that he was saying merely a banal phrase. I knew my face had aged more than my years, and the hardship, whiskers and wound disguised me quite.

—"I have seen you everywhere, without being seen," I answered.

—"Do you want promotion?"

—"It is pretty late."

He crossed his arms and did not answer a while. Then:

—"You are right. Three more days, and you and I will quit the service."

He turned his back on me and mounted his

horse again, which had been held a few steps away. That same moment the head of our column had attacked and we were being shelled. One shell fell in front of our company. A few drew back upon a first impulse, and then hesitated, ashamed. Bonaparte alone went towards the bomb, that smoked and sputtered before his horse, and made it sniff the smoke. All remained silent and stock-still. The bomb burst, and hurt no one.

The grenadiers realised the terrible lesson Napoleon had given them. I felt, besides that, something that smacked of despair. France was failing him, and for a moment he had doubted his old heroes. I felt I was too much avenged, and he too much punished for his faults by so great a desertion. I rose with difficulty, and stumbling towards him I grasped and wrung the hand he held out to several among us. He did not recognise me at all, but to me it meant a tacit reconciliation between the most obscure and the most illustrious of the men of our century.

The charge was sounded, and next day, at sunrise, Rheims was retaken by us. But so was Paris a few days later, by others!

Captain Renaud remained silent a long time after this tale and hung his head. I did not want to interrupt his musing. I regarded this fine man with veneration, and while he spoke I had followed attentively the slow transformations in this good and simple soul, always repressed within its self-immolation, always crushed by an invincible power, but winning through to find rest in humblest and most austere duty.

His obscure existence appeared to me as beautiful inwardly as the brilliant life of any man of action whosoever.

Each wave of the sea adds a film of white to the beauties of a pearl; each billow labours slowly to make it more perfect; each puff of foam that floats upon it, leaves it a mysterious hue, half golden, half translucent, through which the inward ray that emanates from its heart may be only divined.

Quite in the same manner this man's character had been formed in vast upheavals, in the depths of darkest and perpetual trials. I knew that as long as the Emperor lived he had considered it a duty never to serve in the Army, respecting what he called common decency, despite all the entreaties of his friends.

And afterwards, freed by Napoleon's death from the bond of his old promise to a master who knew him no more, he had returned to command, in the Royal Guards, the remnants of his Old Guard.

As he never spoke about himself, no one had ever thought of him and he had had no promotion. He worried little about that. It was his custom to say that unless one is a general at twenty-five, the age when one's imagination can be given scope, it were better to remain a simple captain to live with the soldiers as a family father, as a prior of a monastery.

"Look," he said to me after this spell of rest, "watch our old grenadier Poirier, with his sombre, squinting eyes, his bald head and the sword slashes on his cheek. The Marshals of France used to stop and admire him when he presented arms for them at the King's door. Look at Beccaria with his profile of a Roman veteran, at Fréchou with his white whiskers, at that whole first row, all decorated, with three chevrons on their sleeves! What would they have said, those old friars of the ancient Army, if I had failed them this morning, I who still commanded them a fort-

night ago? It would have been different if I had taken on fireside habits of ease or another profession several years ago.

"Why, look how still everything is in Paris to-night, still as the air," he added, rising with me. "Here is day breaking. No doubt they will begin smashing street lamps again, and to-morrow we'll go back to quarters. Probably in a few days I shall retire, to a little corner of land I own somewhere in France where there is a little tower in which I will finish up my studies on Polybius, Turenne, Folard and Vauban, to amuse myself. Nearly all my comrades were killed in the Great Army, or have died since. It has been a long time since I have talked with anybody, and you know by what road I have come to hate war, while waging it energetically all the time."

Thereupon he wrung my hand heartily while again asking me for the gorget he needed, if mine were not rusted and if I could find it at my home. Then he called me back and said:

"Look here, as it is not altogether impossible they will again fire on us from some window, I beg of you to keep for me this portfolio full of old letters. They interest me, me alone, and

you will burn them if we do not see each other again.

"Several of our old comrades have happened along and we have begged them to return to their homes. We are not fighting a Civil War. We are as serene as firemen whose duty it is to put out a fire. Explanations will follow; that does not concern us."

And he left me, smiling.

CHAPTER IX

A MARBLE

Two weeks after this conversation, which the Revolution itself had not made me forget, I was thinking alone about his modest heroism and disinterestedness, both so rare! I tried to forget the pure blood that had been shed, and I reread in the history of America how, in 1783, the victorious Anglo-American Army, after having delivered the country and laid down arms, was on the point of revolting against Congress which, too poor to pay it, was getting ready to disband it. Washington, generalissimo and conqueror, had but to say a word or nod his head to be Dictator. He did what only he had the power to accomplish: he disbanded the Army and gave in his resignation.

I had laid down the book and I compared this serene greatness to our restless ambition. I was sad and recalled all the warlike, pure

spirits, without false brilliance, without charlatanism, who have loved power and command only for the public weal, who have guarded it without pride and have neither turned it against the country nor converted it into gold. I thought of all the men who have waged war with the intelligence of its worth. I thought of Collingwood and his resignation, and finally of that obscure Captain Renaud, when I saw coming in a tall man dressed in a long blue cape which was in pretty bad condition. By his white moustache and the scars on his bronzed face, I recognised one of the grenadiers of his company. I asked him if the Captain was still alive, and the emotion of this good fellow showed me something wrong had happened. The grenadier sat down, wiped his forehead, and after a little fussing and a little time, he told me what had happened to the Captain.

During the two days of July 28th and 29th, Captain Renaud had not done a thing but march in column along the streets at the head of his grenadiers. He would place himself in front of the first section of his column, and walk on peaceably amid a hail of stones and rifle shots that came from cafés, balconies and

windows. If he stopped, it was to close up the ranks opened by those that had fallen, and to look if his left guides were keeping their distances and abreast their files. He had not drawn his sword, and marched, cane in hand. At first his orders had come to him promptly. But, either because the aides-de-camp were killed on their way, or because the general staff did not send them, he was left, during the night of the 28th to the 29th, on the Place de la Bastille, without other instructions than to fall back upon Saint-Cloud and destroy the barricades on his way. This he did without firing a shot.

Arrived at the Jéna Bridge he stopped to call the roll of his company. Fewer men were missing with his than with all the other companies of the Guard that had been detached. And his men also were less tired. He had known the trick of letting them rest to good purpose in the shade during those sizzling days, and of finding for them in the abandoned barracks the food which the hostile houses refused them. The aspect of his column was such that he had found each barricade deserted, and had only to take the trouble to demolish it.

There he was standing on the Jéna Bridge

covered with dust, stamping his feet. He was looking towards the barrier to see if anything might trouble the passing of his detachment and told off the scouts to send ahead. There wasn't a soul in the Champ-de-Mars except two masons who seemed asleep, lying on their bellies, and a little boy of about fourteen who ran barefoot and played castanets with two bits of broken pottery. He rattled them from time to time on the parapet of the bridge. In this way he came playing up to the stone on which Renaud stood. The Captain at this moment was pointing out the heights of Passy with his cane. The child came close to him, looking at him with big, startled eyes, and pulling a horse pistol from his blouse, he took it in both hands and pointed it at the Captain's breast. Renaud deflected the pistol with his cane but the child had fired and the bullet hit up in the thigh. The Captain fell to a sitting posture without saying a word and regarded this singular enemy with pity. He saw this young boy holding his weapon with both hands all the time, utterly frightened by what he had done. The grenadiers at the moment were leaning gloomily on their rifles. They disdained lifting a hand against this queer little

one. Some of them lifted their Captain, others just took the child by the arm and led him forward to the man he had wounded.

The boy burst out in tears, and when he saw the blood streaming from the Captain's wound over his white trousers, he was so scared of the butchery that he fainted. The man and the boy were taken to a little house near Passy, at the same time. They both were there still.

The column, led by the lieutenant, had continued on its way to Saint-Cloud, and four grenadiers, after having doffed their uniforms, had remained in this little hospitable house to nurse their old commander.

One of them (the one who was talking to me) had obtained work as a gunsmith's helper in Paris, the others as fencing masters. Bringing their day's wages to the Captain, they had kept him from lacking care till that day. His leg had been amputated. But the fever had been high and bad, and fearing dangerous complications, he had sent for me.

There was no time to lose. I went immediately with the worthy soldier who had told me these details with moist eyes and trembling voice, but without a murmur of injury or ac-

cusation. He only repeated: "It is a great misfortune for us."

The wounded man had been carried into a small shopkeeper's. She was a widow living alone in her little shop in a side-street of the village of Passy, with some young children. She had not been afraid of compromising herself a single moment, and no one had thought of bothering her on the subject. On the contrary, the neighbours had offered their aid in caring for the wounded man. The doctors who had been called in had not deemed him fit to be moved after the operation. So she had kept him and spent several nights by his bedside.

When I came in, she went ahead of me with an air of gratitude and shyness that pained me. I felt how much embarrassment she had hidden out of natural goodness and benevolence. She was very pale, and her eyes were red and tired. She went back and forth to a tiny rear shop which I noticed from the door, and I saw, by the way she hurried, that she was setting the little sick-chamber to rights with a sort of coquettishness, in order that I, the stranger, might find it fitting. There-

fore I took pains to go in very slowly, giving her all the time she needed.

"You see, sir, he has suffered a great deal!" she said opening the door to me.

Captain Renaud was sitting up in a little bed with serge curtains set in a corner of the room. Several bolsters propped up his body. He was thin as a rail and on his cheekbones were two fiery red spots. The wound on his forehead was black. I saw he did not have long to live. His smile, too, told me so.

He gave me his hand and motioned me to sit down. At his right a young boy was holding a glass of sweetened water which he stirred with a spoon. He rose and gave me his chair. Renaud, from his bed, took him by the tip of the ear, and told me softly in a weakened voice:

"Look, *mon cher,* let me introduce my conqueror!"

I shrugged my shoulders, and the poor child lowered his eyes and reddened. I saw a big tear rolling down his cheek.

"Come! Come!" the Captain said, passing his hand over the boy's hair, "it is not his fault. Poor boy! He had met two men who had given him brandy to drink and paid him, and

sent him to fire the pistol at me. He did it just as he might have thrown a marble at the milestone I stood on. Did you not, Jean?"

And Jean began to tremble and took on an expression of such heartbreaking grief that I was touched. I looked at him more closely; he was a very handsome lad.

"It was a marble all right enough, too," said the young shopkeeper. "Look, sir!" And she showed me an agate marble, as big as the heaviest lead bullet, and with which they had loaded the large calibre pistol that lay there.

"No more that that is necessary to cut down a Captain's leg," joked Renaud.

"You must not let him talk much," timidly ventured the young tradeswoman.

Renaud did not hear her:

"Yes, *mon cher,* I have not enough leg left to make a wooden leg stick to it."

I pressed his hand without answering. It was humiliating to see that, to kill a man who had seen and suffered so much, whose breast was bronzed by twenty campaigns and ten wounds, immune to ice and fire, passed by of bayonet and lance, the mere jumping up of

one of these frogs from the gutters of Paris, that are called *gamins,* had sufficed.

Renaud answered my thought. He leaned his cheek on the bolster, and taking my hand said:

"We are at war! He is no more a murderer than I myself was at Rheims. When I killed the Russian lad, perhaps I, too, was a murderer? In the great Spanish War, the men that knifed our sentries did not believe they were assassins, and being at war, they probably were not. The Catholics and the Huguenots murdered each other, or did they not? Of how many murders consists a big battle? That is one of those questions where our reason fails and knows not what to say. It is war that is wrong, not we. I assure you that this little fellow is very nice and very gentle. He reads and writes very well already. He is a foundling. He was a cabinet-maker's apprentice. He has not left my room these two weeks, and he loves me very much, poor lad. He shows aptness for figures. Something can be made of him."

As he spoke with greater difficulty and came close to my ear, I bent over, and he gave me a little piece of folded paper which he asked

me to look through. I recognised a brief will, in which he left a kind of poor little farm he owned to the woman that had taken him in, and after her, to Jean, whom she was to bring up upon condition that he should never be a soldier. He stipulated the sum to be paid for his substitute and gave his little piece of land to his four old grenadiers for a shelter. The execution of all this he gave in charge to a notary in his district.

When I had the paper in my hands he seemed calmer and ready for a rest. Then he shivered, and reopening his eyes he begged me to take and keep his malacca cane. After this he dozed off again. His old grenadier shook his head and took his hand. I took the other, and felt it was icy. He said his feet were cold, and Jean lay down and leaned his young body on the bed to warm him.

Captain Renaud began plucking the blankets with his hands, saying he could not feel them any more, which is a fatal sign. His voice was hollow. With difficulty he lifted one hand to his forehead, looked at Jean attentively and said again:

"It is singular! This lad here resembles the Russian child!" Then he shut his eyes,

and pressing my hand with recurring presence of mind:

"You see, it is the brain that is touched now. It's the end."

His look was different and calmer. We understood this struggle of a strong spirit which judged itself against the pain that made it stray. And this spectacle on this miserable truckle-bed seemed full of solemn majesty. He reddened again and spoke very loud:

"They were fourteen years old . . . both of them. . . . Who knows but it is this young spirit returned in the other's young body to avenge himself? . . ."

Again he shivered. He grew pale and looked at me peacefully, tenderly:

"Tell me! . . . Could you shut my mouth? I am afraid to talk . . . it weakens . . . I don't want to talk any more . . . I am thirsty."

They gave him a few spoonfuls of water, and he said:

"I have done my duty. That thought does good. . . . "

And he added:

"If the country is better for all that has been done, we have nothing to say. But you will see. . . ."

Thereupon he dozed off and slept for about half an hour. After that, a woman came to the door timidly and motioned that the surgeon had come. I left on tip-toe to speak with him and as I went into the little garden with him, and stopped beside a well to question him, we heard a loud cry. We ran in only to draw the sheet over the head of this honest man, who was no more.

CHAPTER X

CONCLUSION

THE period which left me these scant memoirs is finished at present. It opened in 1814 with the battle of Paris and closed with the three *Journées de Paris* in 1830. Those were the times, when, as I have said, the army of the Empire came back to die on the breast of the newly born army, which to-day is well on in years. After having in several ways explained the nature and pitied the condition of poets in our society, I have here wished to show that of the soldier—that other modern pariah.

I wish that for him this book might be what an altar *à la petite Fortune* used to be to the Roman soldier.

It has pleased me to jot down these stories because I place above every other devotion that which seeks to pass unobserved. The most illustrious sacrifices possess something that tends to notoriety and which one cannot help

feeling, in spite of oneself. Vainly one may try to rid them of this character, which exists within them, and forms their force and their support; it is the bone of their flesh, the marrow of their bones. There must have been something in the struggle and in the very spectacle that fortified the martyrs; the rôle in such a drama was so great that it might easily uphold its holy victim. Two ideas maintained his arms on either side—the canonisation here below and the beatification in heaven. May these antique immolations to a holy conviction remain revered for all time; but on the other hand do not those obscure devotions which do not seek even to be known by those whom they serve, also merit our esteem; those modest, silent, deep, abandoned sacrifices which have no hope of being crowned, either by God or man? Those mute resignations whose examples, more frequent than we realise, possess so powerful a merit, that I know of no virtue which may be compared to them?

It is not without intention that I have tried to turn the eyes of the army towards that passive sublimity which lies entirely in abnegation and resignation. It can, of course, never be compared to the sublimity of action,

wherein energetic faculties have wide fields to expand; but it will long be the only one to which the armed man can pretend, for he is armed almost uselessly to-day. The dazzling sublimity of conquerors is perhaps now extinguished forever. Their past brilliancy is waning, I repeat, as little by little the disdain for war waxes stronger in our minds, as in our heart looms up the disgust for such cold-blooded cruelties. Standing armies are burdens to their masters. Each sovereign looks sadly upon his army. This motionless, mute colossus, seated at his feet, annoys and worries him: he does not know what to do with it and fears lest it turn against him. He perceives that it is fairly devoured by its ardour and cannot move. The need of an impossible circulation never ceases to torment the blood of this big body; that blood which never flows and which boils continually. From time to time the rumours of wars rise and rumble like distant thunder; but these powerless clouds vanish, the hurricanes are lost in grains of sand, in treaties, in red-tape! Fortunately, philosophy has diminished war; mechanical inventions will finish by annulling it completely.

But while awaiting for the world, which is

still a child, to rid itself of this atrocious plaything—while waiting, I say, that this end be slowly but inevitably accomplished—the soldier, the army man, must needs be consoled for the rigour of his condition. He feels that the country which loved him on account of the glories with which he crowned her is beginning to disdain his idleness, or to hate him on account of the civil wars in which he is employed to maltreat his mother.

This gladiator who no longer knows even the applause of a circus audience, needs to gain new confidence in himself, and to be just we must needs pity him, because as I have said he is blind and dumb; thrown where others will, fighting to-day against a certain *cocarde,* he asks himself if to-morrow he will not wear that same *cocarde* on his own hat.

What idea will support him if not that of Duty, and the word of honour given; and amid the uncertainties of his road, and his scruples, and his heavy remorse, what sentiment is there that can buoy him up and exalt him in the days of discouragement?

What is there that yet remains sacred?

In the universal shipwreck of beliefs, to what débris can generous hands still cling?

Outside of the love of daily comfort and luxury, nothing seems to swim on the surface of the abyss. One would almost believe that egoism had submerged all. Even those who seek to save souls and who courageously take the plunge, feel themselves about to be swallowed up. To-day the leaders of political parties take catholicism as a password and a flag; but what faith have they in these marvels, and how do they follow these laws in their lives? Artists place it in the light, like a precious medal, and plunge into its dogmas as into a source of epic poetry; but how many among them ever kneel in the church which they are decorating?

Many philosophers embrace and plead the cause as a generous lawyer does that of a poor and abandoned client; their writings and their words smack of its colours and its forms, their books are ornamented with its gothic gildings, their entire labours seem destined to wind the labyrinth of their cunning arguments about the Cross; but when alone it is rare that the Cross be found near them.

Warriors fight and die almost without remembering God. Our century knows that this is true, would want it to be otherwise and cannot! It looks upon itself with a discouraged

eye, and none other has better felt how unfortunate is an epoch which judges itself. Thanks to these disheartening signs certain foreigners believed that we had fallen into a state like that of the Roman Empire, and serious men asked themselves if our national character was not about to disappear forever. But those who know us better have noted that manly determination which still survives in us, dominating that which sophisms have so deplorably worn away. Virile actions in France have lost nothing of their antique virtue. A prompt resolution governs sacrifices, which are as big and as entire as ever. More coolly calculated, all battles are waged with a studied violence. The slightest thought now produces acts that are as noble as were ever inspired by the most fervent faith. In our midst beliefs are feeble, but man is strong. Each scourge finds a hundred Belzunces. The youth of to-day ceaselessly defy death, either from duty or from caprice, and with a Spartan smile—a smile all the more grave since all do not believe in the feast of the gods.

Yes, I believe I can see a solid point on this sombre sea. At first I was uncertain of it, and for a moment could hardly believe it. I

hesitated to examine it and turned my eyes from it. Then finally, because this first view tormented me, I came back, in spite of myself, to this visible, but still uncertain point. I approached it, I circled about it. I looked under and over it; I put my hands on it and I found it strong enough to lean on in times of trouble, and I was reassured.

This is not a new faith, a freshly invented cult, a confused thought; it is a sentiment born with us, independent of time, place and even religion; a proud and inflexible sentiment, an instinct of incomparable beauty, which only in modern times has found a worthy name, but which already had produced sublime grandeurs in ancient days and fertilised them as did those wonderful rivers which at their source and first detours have not as yet an appellation. This faith which it seems to me still remains and reigns supreme in the army is called Honour.

I cannot see that it has lessened or that anything has altered it. It is not an idol, but for the majority of the men is a god, and a god before which many a superior god has tumbled. The fall of all their temples has not in the least unsettled its statue.

An indefinable vitality animates this strange,

proud virtue which stands aloft in the midst of our vices, and yet on such good terms with them that she seems even to profit their energy. While all the virtues seem to descend from heaven to take us by the hand and lift us up, this one alone appears to spring from our inner selves and tends to mount heavenward. It is a splendid human virtue born of earth, without the celestial palm that comes after death; it is the virtue of life!

Just as it is, this cult, interpreted in many different manners, is always uncontested. It is a manly religion, without symbols, without images, without dogma or ceremonies, and whose laws have nowhere been written, and yet how is it that all men have the sentiment of its serious power?

The men of to-day, the men of the times in which I write, are sceptical or ironical on all other subjects save this one. All become grave when the name is pronounced. This is not theory but observation. At the sound of the word Honour man feels something stir within him which is a very part of his being, and this shock awakens all the forces of his pride and his primitive energy. An invincible firmness upholds him against all, and against himself

when he thinks of guarding the pure tabernacle, which within his breast is like a sacred heart wherein a god is enshrined. From thence spring interior consolations all the more beautiful because he is ignorant of their source and real reasons; sudden revelations of Truth, Beauty, Justice—henceforth a shining light ahead of him.

Honour is the conscience, but an exalted conscience. It is one's self-respect and the beauty of one's life carried to the purest height and the most ardent passion. I can see no unity in its principle—and each time some one has undertaken to define it, he has been at a loss for terms. But I cannot see that a more precise definition of God has ever yet been given. Does that prove anything against an existence which is universally acknowledged?

Perhaps the greatest of Honour's merits is in being so strong, no matter what its source! Sometimes it has led men not to wish to survive an insult, and then again it upholds him with a brilliancy and a splendour which atones and effaces the smudge. At other times it knows how to hide both the injury and the expiation. Anon it invents great enterprises, magnificent and persevering struggles, un-

heard of sacrifices, which are slowly accomplished, and are more wonderful in their patience and obscurity than the sudden bursts of enthusiasm, or violent indignation; it inspires benevolent acts which evangelistic charity will never surpass; it has marvellous tolerance, delicate bounties, divine indulgences, and sublime pardons. Always and ever it maintains the personal dignity of man in all its beauty. Honour is a virile modesty. The shame of being lacking in such is for ourselves. Is this inexplicable thing then so sacred?

Weigh then the worth of that expression which is at the same time universal, decisive and the while so simple: *To give one's word of Honour!*

The human word then ceases to be the expression of ideas alone; it becomes the word by experience the most sacred of all words, as if it were born with the first utterance the tongue of man ever formulated; and as if after it no other word were worthy of being pronounced, it becomes the promise of man to man, blessed by all peoples; it becomes the oath itself, because you add the word *"Honour."*

From thenceforth each one has his word;

and clings to it as to his life. The gamester has his, holds it sacred and keeps it; in the disorder of passion it is given, accepted, and profane though it be, it is kept as though holy. That word is nevertheless beautiful, and consecrated everywhere. Is not this principle which one may believe inborn, to which nothing but the interior assent of all binds us, of sovereign beauty when exercised by a warrior?

A word which but too often becomes a mere vocable for political men, becomes a terrible fact for the army man; what the one utters lightly or perfidiously, the other writes in the dust with his blood, and that is why all honour him above all others, and why many must drop their eyes when in his presence.

Let us hope then that the purest of religions while still in its new phases will not attempt to deny or suffocate that sentiment of honour which watches within all of us, like the last lamp in a devastated temple.

Rather, let her take it unto herself and unite it with her splendours by placing it, like another lamp, on the altar she wishes to rejuvenate. There indeed is a divine work to be accomplished.

For myself, struck by this happy sign, I

have not wished to, nor could I accomplish anything save a very humble and very human work wherein I have shown most simply that which I thought was still alive within us. Let us refrain from saying of the antique god of Honour, that it is a false god, for the stone of his altar is perhaps that of the Unknown God. The magic magnet of that stone draws and holds hearts of steel—the hearts of the strong. Say, then, if this is not true, my brave companions, you to whom I tell these stories, O new Theban Legion, you whose head was crushed by the stone of oath, say, then, all of you, saints and martyrs of the religion of Honour.

Paris, August 20th,
1885.

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